

Strange Interlude Study Guide

Strange Interlude by Eugene O'Neill

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Contents

Strange Interlude Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Author Biography.....	5
Plot Summary.....	7
Part 1, Act 1.....	10
Part 1, Act 2.....	13
Part 1, Act 3.....	17
Part 1, Act 4.....	20
Part 1, Act 5.....	24
Part 2, Act 6.....	28
Part 2, Act 7.....	32
Part 2, Act 8.....	36
Part 2, Act 9.....	41
Characters.....	44
Themes.....	47
Style.....	49
Historical Context.....	50
Critical Overview.....	52
Criticism.....	53
Critical Essay #1.....	54
Adaptations.....	57
Topics for Further Study.....	58
Compare and Contrast.....	59
What Do I Read Next?.....	60



[Further Study..... 61](#)
[Bibliography..... 62](#)
[Copyright Information..... 63](#)

Introduction

The play covers a period of twenty-five years in the lives of mostly upper-middle-class East Coast characters. It centers on Nina Leeds, a passionate, tormented woman whose fiancé was killed in World War I and who spends the remainder of her life searching for an always-elusive happiness.

This is a very long play, lasting over five hours in performance. The story is not especially complex, and the length of the play derives from O'Neill's revival of two theatrical devices that had fallen out of use for nearly a century: the soliloquy, in which a character alone on the stage speaks his or her thoughts aloud, and the aside, which enables characters to reveal their thoughts to the audience but not to the other characters on stage. These devices, which O'Neill employed at length, enabled the playwright to probe deeply into his characters' motivations. The soliloquies and asides reveal the discrepancies between what the characters say and do, and what they really feel.

Strange Interlude was a controversial play because it dealt openly with such topics as adultery and abortion. Although it was rarely revived in the early 2000s, it was generally regarded as the first of O'Neill's works in which he revealed his full power as a dramatist.



Author Biography

Eugene O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City, the youngest son of James (an actor) and Ella Quinlan O'Neill. O'Neill was educated at a Catholic boarding school and at Betts Academy in Stamford, Connecticut, before attending Princeton University in 1906. He was dismissed from Princeton a year later because of a poor scholastic record. In 1909, O'Neill married Kathleen Jenkins and went to Honduras to join a gold-prospecting expedition. He returned to New York in 1910, the year his son, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill Jr. was born.

In 1910, O'Neill sailed to Argentina, returning destitute the following year. He then shipped as a seaman from New York to Southampton, England, returning in August. O'Neill's personal life was chaotic, and he drank heavily. O'Neill was divorced from his wife in 1912. Later in 1912, he attempted suicide by taking a drug overdose. After his recovery, he discovered he had tuberculosis, and he entered a sanitarium, where he remained for six months. In the sanitarium, he read widely and conceived his desire to become a playwright. In 1913, he wrote his first play, *A Wife for a Life*, as well as eight one-act plays and two long plays.

O'Neill continued to write as he attended Harvard University from 1914 to 1915, during which time he completed one year of George Pierce Baker's playwriting course. The first of his plays to be produced, by an amateur group later known as the Provincetown Players, were *Bound East for Cardiff* and *Thirst* in 1916.

Greater success was not long in coming. In 1920, *Beyond the Horizon* brought O'Neill the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes, and in the same year, *The Emperor Jones* was staged internationally. In 1921, *Anna Christie* won a Pulitzer Prize, and the following year *The Hairy Ape* solidified his reputation as the foremost American dramatist. The financial success that went with this enabled him to buy a farm at Ridgefield, Connecticut, where he lived with his wife Agnes Boulton, whom he had married in 1918.

From 1923 to 1927, O'Neill wrote some of his major plays, including *Desire Under the Elms* (1925), *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Lazarus Laughed* (1927), and *Strange Interlude* (1928), which won the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1927, O'Neill left his wife and two children for Carlotta Monterey, with whom he traveled to Europe and Asia. They married in 1929. Plays of this period include *Dynamo* (1929), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), the comedy *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933) and *Days without End* (1934).

In 1936, O'Neill won the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first American dramatist to do so. O'Neill's two greatest plays were both written toward the end of his career: *The Iceman Cometh* in 1939 (produced in 1946), and *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, written in 1941, but not staged until three years after his death. It won O'Neill a fourth Pulitzer Prize.

Ill-health prevented O'Neill writing any plays during the last decade of his life. He died of pneumonia on November 27, 1953, in Boston, Massachusetts.



Plot Summary

Act 1

Strange Interlude begins in August, 1919, in the library of Professor Leeds's home in New England. Marsden has just returned from World War I in Europe, although he did not serve in the military. He and Leeds discuss Leeds's daughter, Nina, who has had a nervous breakdown following the death of her boyfriend, Gordon, in the war. Leeds believes that Nina has turned against him because he persuaded Gordon to postpone their marriage until Gordon had safely returned from the war. Nina informs her father that she intends to work as a nurse at a sanatorium for wounded soldiers. She still grieves for Gordon and feels this is her duty. Leeds opposes her wish and confesses that he was jealous of Gordon because he wanted to keep Nina's love for himself. But he finally agrees to let Nina go.

Act 2

A year later, Leeds has just died and Nina returns, accompanied by Sam Evans, who is in love with her, and Ned Darrell, a young doctor friend. Evans tells Marsden, whom he regards as Nina's guardian, that he wants to marry her, but Marsden points out that Nina still loves Gordon. Darrell confides in Marsden that Nina has a morbid love of martyrdom and has been giving herself to the wounded soldiers in the hospital. He says that the best thing for her would be to marry Evans, which would help her regain her emotional balance. For her part, Nina is scared that she is no longer able to feel anything, including grief for her deceased father. She feels guilty about the way she has been behaving, and Marsden advises her to marry Evans, even though she does not love him. She consents.

Act 3

Seven months later, Nina is pregnant, but she has not told Evans, her husband. Marsden guesses her secret but says nothing. He is jealous, since he also loves Nina. When Evans's mother finds out that Nina is pregnant, she begs her to have an abortion. She explains the long history of insanity in the family, saying that Nina should never have a child by Evans. Instead, she should take a lover, and raise the child as if Evans were the father. Otherwise the strain of raising a child would affect Evans's sanity. Once Nina has recovered from the shock of this information, she agrees to get an abortion.

Act 4

Seven months later, Evans is trying unsuccessfully to write advertising copy. Nina, who has been ill since the abortion, is contemptuous of him, even though she has tried to love him. Marsden, and later Darrell, come to visit. Marsden is worried about his



mother's health, and Darrell advises him to consult a doctor immediately. After Marsden and Evans depart on an errand, Nina and Darrell are left alone. Nina tells Darrell about her abortion and Mrs. Evans's advice to have a baby by another man. Darrell agrees, saying it is her duty to her husband. They agree that Darrell will be the father of the child, convincing themselves that this will make all three of them happy.

Act 5

Five months later, in April, 1922, in a suburb near New York, Nina is happy to be pregnant, but has not told her husband of her condition. Evans is doing poorly in his career and believes she does not love him. He decides to grant her a divorce for her sake, but he lacks the courage to tell her. She despises him and treats him badly in front of Darrell, with whom she has fallen in love. Darrell desires her but tells himself he is not in love. Marsden enters, in mourning for his dead mother, and senses the attraction between Darrell and Nina. After Marsden exits, Darrell tells Nina he has a guilty conscience and wants to end their affair. But Nina says that only his love can make her happy. She wants a divorce so she can marry Darrell, but he will not hear of such a thing. Instead, Darrell tells Evans that Nina is pregnant and then says he is sailing for Europe in a few days. Nina is distressed at Darrell's sudden departure. She tries but fails to tell Evans that he is not the father of her child.

Act 6

Over a year later, Evans has matured into a confident businessman, and Nina is happy with her son, Gordon. Marsden intends to ask his sister Jane to live with him, and Nina teases him about being a bachelor. He lets on that he has seen Darrell in Munich with a woman, which makes Nina jealous. Evans returns and talks of his business plans, hoping to encourage Marsden to invest in him. Darrell arrives and when he and Nina are alone, they embrace passionately. Darrell wants Nina to go away with him, but Nina refuses to leave her husband. When Evans and Marsden return, Nina sits them all down at a table, where they remain engrossed in their own thoughts, while Nina exults in the desire that all three men have for her. When she goes to bed, the eyes of the men follow her.

Act 7

It is now 1934. In the Evans's apartment on Park Avenue, New York City, Gordon's eleventh birthday is being celebrated. Gordon resents the presence of Darrell, who has given up his medical career. Darrell has adopted biology as a hobby and set up a research station in Antigua. He is bitter about his continuing relationship with Nina, and Nina begs him to go away for two years. When they kiss goodbye, Gordon sees them, and this further alienates him from Darrell, and also from his mother. Gordon gets closer to his father instead. Nina notices this and resolves to get her son's affections back. She speaks disparagingly of Darrell to dismiss the importance of the kiss.



Act 8

It is ten years later, in June, 1944. Gordon is competing in a college rowing race, and Nina, Darrell, Marsden, and Madeline Arnold, Gordon's fiancée, have assembled on Evans's cruiser to watch. Nina is jealous of Madeline for taking Gordon from her, and Marsden is in mourning for his sister, who died two months before. When Marsden, Madeline, and Evans go into the cabin for a drink, Darrell and Nina agree that their passionate relationship is a thing of the past. Nina tries to persuade him to stop Gordon from marrying Madeline. Darrell refuses. Nina then tries to get him to join her in telling Evans that he is not Gordon's real father. Meanwhile, the drunken Marsden confesses his love for Nina and his desire to marry her. Nina tries to tell Madeline about the insanity that runs in the Evans family, but Darrell prevents her. Gordon narrowly wins the race, but Evans, as a result of his excitement, has a stroke.

Act 9

Several months later, Evans dies, and Gordon and Madeline mourn him. Gordon tells her that he believes his mother and Darrell were in love. Gordon still dislikes Darrell and slaps him hard across the face. He immediately apologizes and explains that in reality, he admires the fact that Darrell and Nina were in love but did not act on it out of consideration for Gordon's father. After Gordon leaves, Darrell asks Nina to marry him, but she refuses because she no longer loves him. Then, she admits to Marsden that she loves him, and they agree to marry. Gordon's plane circles overhead, and Nina calls out to him that he must be happy, but she realizes that her son was unable to give her happiness. Nina resolves to grow old in peace with Marsden. She falls asleep and Marsden watches her contentedly.



Part 1, Act 1

Part 1, Act 1 Summary

The story of this innovative play is built around the love of three very different men for the same woman. Over the course of several years, affections shift, relationships change, a child is born and grows to manhood, and life is experienced as a "strange interlude" in the larger, infinite experience of the universe. Of particular interest is the way the story is told, with the characters speaking their thoughts throughout. This direct revelation of the subtext or emotions and motivations behind what the characters say and do, was a novelty at the time the play was written and has since become a popularly used device.

Act 1 takes place in Leeds' study. Marsden enters, looks around, and speaks his thoughts, recalling his first visit, the early death of his father, how difficult it was for him to write in Europe, and how being back in this town provides a quiet "interlude" in which he can remember, ask questions of himself, and write. His thoughts also refer to Nina, to Gordon, his and Nina's childhood friend, and to his mother, whom he thinks is jealous of his friendship with Nina. He jokes to himself about his lack of a sex life, and angrily recalls a difficult and ridiculed sexual encounter with a woman while he was at school.

Leeds enters, he and Marsden greet each other, and Leeds' thoughts reveal he sees Marsden as a calming influence on Nina. They talk about the damaging influence the war (World War I) had on Europe and on Marsden's writing, and then Marsden asks where Nina is. Leeds says she'll be right in, warning Marsden that she's changed. As they speak about how she's behaved since Gordon's death, their thoughts refer to frightening details of Nina's erratic behavior. Leeds' thoughts also reveal his resentment of how people always talked and thought about Gordon so much. When Marsden reveals he found the site where Gordon crashed, Leeds urges him to not tell Nina, saying she needs to get on with her life and then confessing his belief that Nina's begun to hate him. He explains that before war, Gordon and Nina were to be married, but he talked Gordon out of it, and that Nina somehow figured that out. Marsden tells him both he and Nina are imagining things and notices that Nina's coming. Marsden's thoughts reveal he's suddenly and excitedly eager to see her, while Leeds' thoughts express his hope that she's not going to make a scene. He also reveals his anxiety about whether to get her medical treatment.

Nina enters and greets Marsden distantly, her thoughts revealing how little she thinks of him in comparison to Gordon. Marsden's thoughts reveal how hurt he is by her coolness, but out loud he makes a joke. Nina's tone changes, she welcomes him warmly, and then tells her father she's going away, leaving on a train that night. Both Leeds and Marsden react with surprise, with Leeds commenting aloud that the decision is a sudden one and Marsden, in his thoughts, asking to whom she's escaping. In her thoughts, Nina comments on how tired she is of being lectured by her father just as Leeds is lecturing her on how ill she's been and how she needs to take care of herself.



As he talks, Nina's thoughts reveal her passionate memories of Gordon and her desire to get away and contemplate his memory. Aloud, she tells Leeds she's made up her mind, saying that she's taken a job in a sanitarium for crippled soldiers run by a friend of Gordon's, that there's no reason for anyone to worry about her, and that she feels she has to pay for betraying Gordon. In explanation, she says she feels she has to give herself without fear, saying that on the night before he left, she had the chance to give herself physically to him, but he held back. She adds that she should have made him take her because she knew that if he didn't, he'd die and she'd have "no big Gordon or little Gordon" left to her. Finally, she accuses Leeds of telling Gordon to wait, and Leeds confesses that that's what he did, saying he did it for her sake and confessing that he was jealous, that he wanted to keep Nina for himself, and that he was glad when Gordon died. He weeps, asking for her forgiveness.

As Marsden worries in his thoughts about keeping his mother waiting, Nina forgives Leeds and asks him to understand how she must find a way to give herself to Gordon. Leeds says he does understand, but Marsden says Nina won't be able to stay away long. She asks him to help her pack, commenting that one day she'll read her story in one of his books and joking with him affectionately. As they go off, Leeds' thoughts turn to preparing for the classes he's due to teach at the university in a few weeks, to the day-to-day functions of his house and neighborhood, and to his hopes that now Nina will get over Gordon for good. Suddenly, his thoughts turn to how lonely and abandoned he feels, and he calls aloud for Nina. When she answers, he calms himself and reminds her to call a taxi in plenty of time to get her to her train. His thoughts turn to what he believes will be his lonely death; he pulls out a book, and reads aloud in Latin.

Part 1, Act 1 Analysis

The purpose of this act is to lay the dramatic, technical, and thematic foundations for the emotionally epic story that unfolds over the following eight acts. In terms of the drama, the most important foundational element is the way Nina is haunted by memories of Gordon. Her obsession with him is more intense at some points in the play and milder in others, but it drives her choices and fuels her emotions one way or another until the story's end. At the same time, Leeds' affection, jealousy, and resentment foreshadow the similar reactions of the other men who come into Nina's life who all encounter difficulties in their relationships with her because of her obsession and, therefore, come to resent Gordon as well. Finally, her comment about having no big/little Gordon functions on two levels. First, it foreshadows and defines her constant search for someone to replace Gordon and the way she constantly compares the men in her life to him. Second, it foreshadows the birth of her son a few acts hence, and the fact that she names him Gordon and becomes as obsessed with him as she is with the memory of his namesake.

The most important technical aspect of this scene is the way thoughts are spoken aloud, a device used throughout the play to illuminate the inner circumstances of each character. There are several ways in which this device is used. The first is to reveal true reactions concealed by spoken dialogue, an example of which is the way that Marsden's



thoughts reveal how upset he is by how cool Nina is being but in his dialogue, he makes a joke. The second is to reveal the true depth of feeling behind what a character is saying, with the best example of this being the way that Nina's often poetically written thoughts reveal her apparently inexhaustible anguish and grief over Gordon's death. The third way in which the speaking aloud of thoughts is used is as a stream of consciousness, conveying the seemingly random way in which thoughts move from one to the other without apparent purpose. An example of this appears in the act's final moments, in which Leeds' thoughts wander from subject to subject. All three aspects of this device are used with varying degrees of frequency throughout the play, effectively revealing subtext, or true emotions and motivations, and therefore leaving little or no doubt in our minds as to what a character is going through at a particular moment.

The play's two principal themes are both sketched in relatively lightly in this scene, but they are developed in more depth as the action of the play unfolds. The first relates to the idea discussed in the introduction that life and the incidents therein are only "interludes" in the larger framework of the endless existence of the universe. This idea is hinted at in Marsden's actual use of the word "interlude," in which he sees his visit to the town as an interlude in the larger framework of his life. Glimpses of this theme appear throughout the play. A second theme refers back to the constant presence of Gordon in Nina's memory and, as the play continues, the thoughts of just about every other character. The theme developed as a result relates to obsession, and how damaging such obsession is. Examples of this can be found not only in Nina's thoughts, but also in Leeds' comments about Gordon, revealing that a jealous obsession can be just as dangerous and as soul-destroying as a romantic one. The similarly negative effects of such obsessions appear throughout the play, effectively dramatizing this theme and bringing it to evocative life.

Other elements that appear throughout the play include Marsden's devotion to his mother, his prudery, and his feelings of tenderness toward Nina, all of which later affect his actions and relationships. The latter is particularly important, given that his ongoing patience and love are finally rewarded in the play's final moments, the thematic resonances of which will be discussed at that point.



Part 1, Act 2

Part 1, Act 2 Summary

This scene also takes place in Leeds' study, a year or so after the action of the first act. Marsden sits alone, his thoughts referring to his curiosity about whether Nina will grieve her father's death, his resentment over how she's never acknowledged his letters the whole time she's been away, and his jealous belief that every patient at the hospital where she's working has fallen in love with her. He recalls her comments about giving herself to other people, and wonder whether that means she's given herself physically. He hears a car approach, wonders whether he should greet Nina when she arrives, looks out a window, and angrily notices a man accompanying her.

A moment later, Nina enters, saying she brought Darrell with her in the hopes that she wasn't too late. Her thoughts reveal both happy and unhappy memories of her father, and that for her when Gordon died, all men died. Marsden's thoughts, meanwhile, reveal his fantasy that she would throw herself into his arms when she returned. He and Nina argue briefly about why she never came to see her father, and then Nina goes upstairs to see his body, taking Darrell with her.

After a moment alone with his angry thoughts about how that isn't truly Nina, Marsden notices the entrance of Evans, who explains that he's Darrell's assistant. He reminds Marsden that they met one day when he was visiting Nina at the hospital. Marsden's and Evans' thoughts reveal their negative first impressions of each other, they make small talk about how long they've both known Nina, and then Evans reveals and that he both knew Gordon and idolized him. His thoughts reveal that he tried to succeed at everything Gordon did but failed, and that he believes he'll fail at winning Nina's heart in the same way. Marsden then asks Evans how he knows Darrell, and Evans says they were roommates in college and ran into each other again a couple of years later. He jokes about how Darrell doesn't really have a lot of close relationships, but his thoughts reveal his belief that Darrell is his best friend and that Darrell encourages his hopes for a relationship with Nina. Aloud, Evans and Marsden both express their concern for her, with Marsden's thoughts revealing his fantasy of having Nina and his mother both nearby and of therefore being able to write again. Evans' thoughts reveal that he sees Marsden as being like Nina's guardian, and he confesses that he's asked her to marry him. Marsden reminds him she's still in love with the memory of Gordon. Evans says he doesn't blame her, saying she should love him for a long time yet and that he's nothing compared to him. Marsden's thoughts reveal his jealousy, but aloud, he wishes Evans good luck.

Darrell enters, and as Marsden's thoughts reveal his patronizingly negative first impressions, Darrell sends Evans out to fill a prescription for Nina. As Evans exits, both Darrell's and Marsden's thoughts reveal how negatively they see each other. Aloud, Darrell talks about how frustrated he is with Nina, saying she's conditioned herself to feel nothing and has to be convinced to change her ways or else she's going to be in



real psychological trouble. Marsden reacts angrily, and in his thoughts Darrell realizes he has to tell him the truth but not too much since Marsden seems emotionally fragile. Darrell explains that as a result of losing Gordon, Nina became extremely promiscuous, using polite language to Marsden but more graphic language in his thoughts. He then tries to convince Marsden to help Nina break free of her current condition, saying that the only possible way he sees is to get her to marry Evans because his deep, apparently normal love is what she needs. He goes on to talk about Evans' good points, including his stable family, and adds he's mentioned the idea to Nina. Marsden accuses him of being in love with Nina himself, but Darrell says she believes she belongs to Gordon and that he doesn't like the idea of sharing a woman he loves with a ghost.

Nina enters, comments strangely on her father's death, and jokes harshly about the meaninglessness of the words life and death. In his thoughts, Marsden speaks harshly of her and of all women, mentally apologizing to his mother for including her. Darrell suggests they all sit down, Nina jokes about how he's making prescriptions for her again, and reveals to Marsden that Darrell kissed her once but seemed immediately disgusted. Darrell's thoughts reveal about how angry he was that she seemed so indifferent as Nina talks about how she was trying to pray by her father's bedside but didn't seem to be feeling anything, saying that she couldn't believe God could or would care about human life or death and that she wanted to imitate His indifference. Marsden tries to get her to be quiet, but Darrell's thoughts reveal his belief that Marsden is being foolish, that talking will do Nina good. He gets up to go for a walk, his thoughts revealing his hope that Marsden will talk Nina into being with Evans.

As Darrell exits, Marsden's thoughts reveal how simultaneously thrilled and terrified he is at being alone with Nina. Nina comments on his fear, Marsden confesses he's afraid of life, and Nina responds with a long poetic speech about how there would be no fear if God had been imagined to be a woman instead of a man. With sudden intensity she talks about wanting to believe in something and how she can't feel anything. She then kneels by his side and sobs in his lap. As he comforts her, his thoughts reveal his joy at their connection and how much he loves her. Nina then tells him she needs him to punish her for being a "silly slut." In his thoughts, Marsden reacts with disgust as Nina confesses in an emotionally and poetically intense speech that she had sex with several men and would have kept on doing it if she hadn't had a dream of Gordon, standing with the men she slept with and looking at her sadly. Marsden's thoughts again reveal his disgust as he comments on how he wants to hate her, how his mother is waiting, and how he has to approach the idea of punishing her. Speaking in a similar manner to Leeds, he tells her that the only way she can redeem herself is to marry Evans. Half asleep, Nina calls him "father" and says she doesn't love Evans. Marsden tells her Evans loves her, and that that, along with having children, will redeem her. Nina mumbles that being a mother will be a better way of giving herself than sleeping with strange men, and she promises to never be bad again. As she falls asleep, Marsden lifts her into his arms to carry her upstairs. Evans enters and worries that she fainted, but Marsden tells him she's only asleep and that he has reason to hope for their marriage. As Marsden takes Nina out, he says he's got to get back home to his mother. After he's gone, Evans jumps with sudden joy.



Part 1, Act 2 Analysis

All the elements established in Act 1 are developed further in this act. Dramatically, the second and third of the three men with whom Nina becomes romantically involved are introduced. On the technical side, the device of having characters speak their thoughts is put to particularly interesting use as first Marsden and Evans, and then Marsden and Darrell, simultaneously reveal their first impressions of each other and then cover those impressions up with polite small talk in the first case and a brusque lack of emotion in the second. Thematically, the idea of interludes is indirectly developed through the way that Nina seems to be going through life in phases or interludes, including a promiscuous phase, which is apparently to be followed by a domestic phase if her three men all have their way, which, of course, they do.

Another aspect of this theme is developed in Nina's comments about God, which seem to suggest that at least to her, relatively short interludes like her promiscuous phase and larger interludes like her life are not just passing moments in the history of the universe but are also completely irrelevant. Without putting it in so many words, Nina's speeches liken the universe to God, or to the male ideal of God, defining an important paradox at the heart of the play's action and themes--events in human lives are desperately important to those living them, but to God and to the rest of the universe, they are nothing. On one level, this is perhaps what is meant by the title's reference to the interludes lived in this play as "strange." On another level, this is also the first of several references that refer to two different aspects of God--male, uninterested, and violent, and female, nurturing, life giving, and emotional. Tensions between these two aspects are dramatized throughout the play, climaxing in Nina's being torn between the two aspects in the play's second half.

The second theme, relating to the danger of obsessions, is developed in several ways. The general obsession with Gordon is developed further through the hero-worship of Evans and the various aspects of Nina's memory, while Marsden's parallel obsessions with Nina and his mother are also developed, the first through his emerging fantasies and the second by the way thoughts of returning home intrude into his thoughts at almost comically inopportune moments. The idea of obsession is also explored through the various discussions of Nina's promiscuity, which reveal a different and troubling angle to her obsession with Gordon.

Nina's promiscuity is interesting from another perspective as well. At the time the play was written (the late 1920's) women's sexuality was a mostly taboo subject, with the idea that women had any feelings of sexuality other than those required by their husbands and the biological drive to reproduce being relatively unheard of. A promiscuous woman like Nina would have been seen as scandalous, which means the general idea that marrying her to Evans would be a good thing is not only coming from a place of wanting Nina to heal but also from a place of wanting to avoid her being branded an outcast. At the same time, Nina's ideas of a female God are interesting in terms of reimagining the way the universe might relate to individual human lives and establishing an ongoing thematic tension that develops throughout the play. They would



also have been as potentially scandalous as her promiscuity, given that societal interpretations of God at the time were all significantly male oriented. These two aspects to Nina's character create a fascinating dynamic, with the impression being developed here and throughout the play of a woman who is clearly emotionally unstable, but who is, just as clearly, morally, intellectually, and spiritually ahead of her time.

Finally, it's interesting to note how the three central male characters are individualized, or differentiated, through the way they speak, think, act, and most relevantly, love. On all those levels, Marsden is intellectual, snobbish, and prudish. Evans is open and straightforward, and Darrell is clinical and objective. As opportunities to express and act on their love come and go throughout the play, it's also interesting to note whose approaches change and whose don't, and whose methods are successful and whose aren't. This treatment of the three characters is also thematically relevant in that Marsden's and Darrell's feelings for Nina become as obsessive as hers for Gordon, while Evans' love remains relatively stable and straightforward. This reinforces the thematic point relating to the dangers of obsession, with Evans' simpler love seemingly being held up as an ideal.

At the core of it all, of course, is Nina, who only wants to be loved by one man, who just happens to be dead. There are several possible explanations as to why they all find Nina so fascinating. She's undeniably vulnerable, her emotional fragility awakening the need in each of these men, at one time or another, to protect and help her. At the same time, she's a dynamic, intriguing personality, and since two of the men (Marsden and Evans) already have strong women in their lives, there is the possibility that they are perhaps comfortable only with someone comparably strong. Perhaps the most important reason for the men's love, or more accurately their determination to get her to love them, however, is a very male competitiveness, a desire to win out over the influence of the omnipresent Gordon. Throughout the play, all three of them refer to their relationships with Nina in terms of him, a man who has been a successful athlete, lover, and human being. It's very possible that all these men, who have in various ways been underdogs their whole lives, see winning Nina as a victory over all the Gordon-like, god-like people in all the areas of their lives that have made them feel that they were something less. The irony is that for Nina, success in a relationship is defined by who loves her most like Gordon.

An important piece of foreshadowing occurs in Darrell's passing reference to Evans' stable family, which ironically foreshadows the revelations of family insanity offered by Evans' mother in the following scene.



Part 1, Act 3

Part 1, Act 3 Summary

About 7 months later, Nina sits in the dining room of the Evans family home, writing a letter to Darrell. As she reads it aloud to herself, we learn that she and Evans have been married for over 6 months, that Darrell has neither written nor visited, and that he's gotten a new job. She talks about how the house feels haunted and dead, and then looks up from the letter. Her thoughts reveal that she's pregnant, that she's keeping it a secret because she wants to keep her baby just for her, and how she feels that because Darrell wanted her to marry Evans, it's partly his baby as well. She goes back to the letter, referring to how Evans' mother has been insisting they visit.

Marsden enters, Nina covers up her letter, and Marsden's thoughts reveal his curiosity about why. Nina notices he's written a letter as well, Marsden says he's been writing his mother, and in her thoughts Nina comments on how she hopes her child will be as devoted to her as Marsden is to his mother. Nina reveals she was writing to Darrell, and Marsden's thoughts reveal his jealousy. After some teasing conversation Nina runs out, leaving Marsden to wonder in his thoughts whether she's truly happy, commenting on how in the early days of her marriage, she seemed to be playing the part of a happy wife and how she's suddenly changed. He realizes this could be the result of her becoming pregnant, and that if she has a baby, maybe he'll finally accept that he's lost her. When he hears the voices of Evans and his mother, he looks out the window at them, commenting on what a strong character the mother is, but that her eyes are sad and grim. He also talks about how Evans seems unaware of Nina's presumed pregnancy, saying that she hasn't told him out of feeling the "ancient shame ... of bringing fresh pain into the world." He quickly exits, and Evans and his mother (Mrs. Evans) enter.

Evans talks excitedly about his plans for future success and for the family farm. Mrs. Evans doesn't seem to be listening, her thoughts revealing that she's thinking about whether Nina is pregnant. She asks Evans, who says he doesn't think so. Mrs. Evans' thoughts reveal her relief, while Evans' thoughts reveal how excited he'd be about being a father, and how he thinks it would mean that Nina really loved him. Aloud, he talks about going upstairs to visit his aunt, but Mrs. Evans discourages him, urging him instead to drive into town with Marsden so she can spend some time getting to know Nina. As Evans runs out, Mrs. Evans' thoughts reveal that Evans' happiness is the most important thing to her, and then they return to her hopes that Nina isn't pregnant.

Nina enters, greets Mrs. Evans, talks about how much she ate at breakfast, and apologizes for coming down so late. Mrs. Evans asks whether she experienced anything strange about the house, and Nina lies and says no. Mrs. Evans then asks whether Nina truly loves Evans, and whether she's having a baby. When Nina says yes, Mrs. Evans tries to convince her that she can't ever have a child. As she and Nina argue, Mrs. Evans reveals that insanity runs through Evans' father's family, and that



several relatives, including his father and his aunt (the one she just discouraged him from visiting), went mad. Nina refuses to believe her. Mrs. Evans says Evans has no idea, and that she believes that her husband would have remained sane if she hadn't given birth. Nina angrily talks about her belief that if Evans gave her children, she'd learn to love him, adding she hates her baby because it's not hers anymore. It's his and, therefore, it's sick.

As Mrs. Evans warns Nina that Evans really will go insane if she leaves, Nina's thoughts reveal her anger at herself for using Evans, acting fearfully in the same way she did with Gordon. Mrs. Evans pleads with her to stay, and in her thoughts, Nina expresses the belief that Gordon's spirit is calling to her to give him the life that she couldn't give him. She resolves to keep the baby and name him Gordon, saying aloud to Mrs. Evans that she'll stay. She suddenly breaks down in tears, and in her thoughts, Mrs. Evans likens Nina's suffering to hers and tries to comfort her. They talk about how important it is for Evans' happiness that the baby be born, about how neither of them believes in God anymore as a result their discoveries, and how making Evans happy even though they're suffering is ultimately a good thing. Finally, Mrs. Evans says that Nina and Evans have got to put her out of their minds and their lives, forgetting the sorrow she's brought to them and concentrating solely on their own happiness. She and Nina continue to sob.

Part 1, Act 3 Analysis

Aside from the revelation about the insanity in Evans' family, the most important dramatic element in this scene is the frequent foreshadowing of that revelation. This occurs in Nina's references to the atmosphere of the house, her comments about how much she ate at breakfast (presumably because she's pregnant), and Marsden's musings about the reasons for her sudden shift to genuine happiness. They also occur, perhaps most tellingly, in Mrs. Evans' strange insistence that Evans not go up to see his aunt and her increasingly desperate and tortured thoughts about what she's got to say. All of this combines to create a vividly defined sense of foreboding and imminent danger, an example of the way in which the play has overtones of a "gothic" style.

"Gothic" describes an artistic form in which situations and emotions become almost exaggerated in their importance, intensity, and starkness. For example, gothic drama and fiction often contain a deep, dark family secret such as the Evans' family's insanity, long repressed and overwhelmingly passionate feelings like Nina's obsession with Gordon and Marsden's with Nina, and evocative descriptions of atmosphere such as those contained in Nina's references to the ambiance of the house. *Strange Interlude* uses this intense style of writing to reinforce the previously discussed thematic point that in spite of the intensity in which life is lived, it's still only an interlude in the life of the universe at large.

Aside from the repeated foreshadowing of Mrs. Evans' revelation, other important elements of foreshadowing include Nina's reference to Darrell's being as good as a father to her baby, which foreshadows his eventual fathering of another baby by Nina, and Evans' hopes for success in business which foreshadows his eventual and actual



success. Perhaps most important, Nina's determination to give her child Gordon's name foreshadows her actually doing so when her child by Darrell is born.

In terms of the play's technical aspects, the device of speaking thoughts aloud is expanded to include the reading of Nina's letter, but it is used most effectively here in its "stream-of-consciousness" form, dramatically conveying the tortured nature of both Nina's and Mrs. Evans' thoughts and feelings. From a dramatic perspective, in terms of exploring Nina's relationships with the three men in her life, we see clearly in Evans' thoughts how simple, straightforward, and honest his love for Nina is, and in Marsden's how relatively passionless and intellectual his love is. Even though he's not actually in the scene, Darrell's feelings can be inferred from his absence, which suggests that he cares for Nina so much that he can't stand to see her married to another man.

Finally, in terms of the developing thematic tensions between "Mother" and "Father" God, it's unclear to which aspect Nina and Mrs. Evans are referring when they say they don't believe in God anymore. Because the idea of a possible "Mother" God occurs with such hopeful intensity to Nina at the end of Part 1, Act 5, it's possible that at this point the God that both she and Mrs. Evans refer to abandoning is Father God. It seems that Mrs. Evans hasn't, or won't, replace "Him" with faith in another kind of God, but Nina clearly does, identifying more with "Mother" God more and more as her attachment to her son increases.



Part 1, Act 4

Part 1, Act 4 Summary

This scene takes place back in Leeds' study, again about 7 months later. Evans sits at Leeds' desk, trying to work, but his thoughts reveal that it isn't going well, that Nina has been sick and won't tell him with what, that she changed dramatically after talking with his mother, and that he believes she got sick as a result of trying to get pregnant and being repeatedly disappointed that it didn't happen. He remembers Darrell is coming out for a visit, and he reminds himself to keep the fact that he and Darrell planned this visit a secret. As he goes back to work, Nina enters without his noticing, her thoughts revealing her simultaneous contempt for him and gratitude for his efforts to love her. She tells herself she must try to love him better, with her thoughts revealing that she didn't dare to give birth to their child because of what Mrs. Evans told her about the insanity in the family. The suggestion is that Nina has had an abortion.

Evans notices that Nina's entered and apologizes for disturbing her with his typing. Nina angrily tells him he didn't disturb her, but she realizes she's being unnecessarily cruel and tries to comfort him, apologizing for being weak and sickly. Evans tells her how wonderful she is and how grateful he is for her love. As they embrace, Nina's thoughts reveal that she pities Evans more than loves him, but aloud, she says she just wants him to be happy. When he says he is, Nina's thoughts return to the operation that took her baby from her and to her subsequent dreams of Gordon's ghost following her around. She promises herself to try again to become pregnant, and aloud invites Evans to join her in bed sometime soon. He responds happily but worries that she won't be well enough. She assures him that she will be, and then as he kisses her speaks in her thoughts to Mrs. Evans and to Gordon, assuring them that she's doing what they both want--trying to make Evans happy and comparing the way she gives herself to him to the way she gave herself to the strangers in Darrell's hospital. Aloud, Nina mentions that Marsden is coming by with suggestions about her biography of Gordon, which leads Evans to mention that Darrell is also coming. She responds with happy surprise and exits to prepare the guest bedroom, commenting that Marsden won't stay long if Darrell is also there. Evans' thoughts reveal how glad he is that she seems happier.

Marsden enters, Evans tells him Nina's lying down, and Marsden tells him not to disturb her, saying he can't stay long because his mother is not well. His thoughts reveal his fear that it's something serious, that he dislikes the way Evans and Nina have changed Leeds' study, that he suggested that Nina write the biography of Gordon as a means of helping her get over him, and that he knows about the abortion and is disgusted by it. As he watches Evans read, his thoughts reveal his contempt for him and for the way he hero-worships Gordon, and aloud he says he met Gordon's parents once and couldn't believe how he could have come from such a lower-class family. Evans says he can understand everything in the notes, and as Marsden prepares to leave, the doorbell rings. Evans says it's Darrell and goes to meet him. In his thoughts Marsden wonders whether it was Darrell who performed Nina's abortion, and whether he should ask him



about his mother's condition. Darrell enters, he and Marsden greet each other, and Evans exits to get Nina. Darrell and Marsden's thoughts reveal that they feel the same negative response to each other as they did when they first met, and then aloud, Marsden asks Darrell's opinion about his mother's illness. He understands Darrell's response to mean that he thinks his mother has cancer and reacts angrily. Darrell gives him the name of a doctor for her to see as soon as possible. Marsden becomes extremely upset, Darrell's thoughts reveal his surprise that Marsden could feel so deeply about anyone, and then aloud, he apologizes for upsetting him and urges him to take care of the situation soon.

Evans enters, saying Nina wants him to pick up some things at the store and asking Marsden to give him a ride. After Marsden goes out, Evans urges Darrell to have a good talk with Nina when she comes down. Alone with his thoughts, Darrell wonders what Marsden would do if his mother died, and then his thoughts turn to the troubles in Nina and Evans' marriage, to his longstanding physical attraction to Nina, and how he can't understand why she hasn't had a child yet, believing it to be the best thing for her.

Nina enters, she and Darrell greet each other, and their thoughts reveal that they still find each other attractive, with Nina comparing his strong handshake favorably with Gordon's. They talk casually about Darrell's success in his work and about Nina's working with Marsden on Gordon's biography in spite of Marsden's dislike of the subject. As Darrell's thoughts reveal his discomfort with Nina's continued obsession with Gordon, Nina asks him whether there's a woman in his life. When he reveals that there isn't, she taunts him with what he said to her about love, marriage, and children being good for a person, and angrily says he was wrong in every way. This leads her to confess that she was in fact pregnant, and that she loved the unborn child so much that she half-believed that Gordon was its father. As Darrell's thoughts reveal his belief that her obsession with Gordon is "idiotic," Nina tells him what Mrs. Evans told her about the insanity in the family. She blames Darrell for manipulating her into this situation, Darrell's thoughts reveal that he blames himself, and aloud, he apologizes. Nina angrily explains that she promised Evans' mother she'd stay with him and make him happy, says that she has to have a baby for that to happen, and asks Darrell for his support and ideas on how she can accomplish that.

In an effort to be calm and professional, Darrell coolly and clinically asks her what she plans to do. Equally clinical, and speaking of herself in the third person, Nina explains that she wants to find a healthy man to father her child, and her thoughts reveal that she is beginning to see Darrell as that man. Darrell's thoughts reveal that he sees the situation as an experiment, objectively commenting that his racing pulse indicates his long-dormant desire for Nina is still present. Nina tells him the truth about the baby's parentage must be kept from Evans, and confesses that she's afraid. Darrell says she must have courage, while in his thoughts he tells himself that fathering Nina's child is the right and rational thing to do, that he's helping a friend (Evans) and a patient (Nina), and that the situation can be treated as scientific research, observing whether happiness really will enter the lives of Nina, Evans, and the child. In her thoughts Nina is determined to have the baby, and aloud, she asks Darrell to help her not feel guilty. Now also referring to both Nina and himself in the third person, Darrell tells her that her first



duty is to give herself and her husband a healthy child. Nina takes his hand, and as his thoughts reveal how excited he is by the idea of being with her, Nina speaks (still in the third person) about how she needs the father of her child to be someone she respects, and someone to whom she's attracted. Darrell confesses he's always been attracted to her, and adds that the father of her child has also got to have a superior scientific mind. Nina, speaking of Darrell in the third person, says she's always thought he had a superior mind. Darrell's thoughts become less clinical and more incoherent, revealing his surging desire for happiness. Nina expresses her gratitude, Darrell falls to his knees before her and agrees to father her baby in the spirit of creating her happiness, and Nina's thoughts reveal her determination to be happy and to make her husband happy.

Part 1, Act 4 Analysis

Dramatically, the essential function of this scene is to define, and re-define, the status of the three central relationships--Darrell and Nina become closer, Evans remains deluded about who Nina truly is (although he has vague suspicions), and Marsden deliberately distances himself from both his feelings and from Nina herself. This is partly the result of his fastidious disgust over her abortion, but also because of his deep concern and attachment to his mother, whose illness in this scene foreshadows her eventual death. At the same time, Marsden's concern foreshadows the concern Nina's son feels for her in Act 6, with the physical deterioration of Marsden's mother and her eventual death paralleling Nina's emotional deterioration in the eyes of her son and their eventual estrangement.

The thematic point about the dangers of obsession resurfaces in this scene as the result of the repeated references to Gordon's presence in Nina's life, dreams, fantasies, and work. Her perception of and interaction with reality is clearly suffering at this point, an aspect of her situation that Darrell seems to realize, but also seems helpless to remedy as the result of the reawakening of his overwhelming attraction to her. He goes a little insane himself in this scene, a reaction that will haunt him throughout the rest of the play. All in all, the ways in which the story is developed in this act--the sudden, drastic, and slightly unrealistic decisions, the surges of overwhelming emotion referred to in heightened language, the starkly defined distinctions between what is perceived and what is true--are further examples of its gothic nature.

In terms of the story's technical foundations, the device of having the characters verbalize their thoughts and emotions functions extremely well in this act. Nowhere else in the play is it used to more emotionally evocative and more dramatic effect, with the carefully clinical language of Nina's and Darrell's verbal communication contrasting powerfully with the surging passions revealed by their spoken feelings. Having them both speak in the third person about themselves and each other heightens this contrast.

A key question in this scene is how much Nina plans, in terms of her request to Darrell, and how much is spontaneous. The text makes it clear that his visit is a surprise and that they're still attracted to each other. It also defines the moment in which she realizes Darrell could possibly be the man who could help her realize her goals. When did she



decide that she needed a surrogate father for her child? Her dialogue and her thoughts suggest that the idea has been taking shape for some time, perhaps since her abortion or even her visit to Evans' mother. Darrell's appearance, therefore, triggers inspiration in her, which triggers her sudden release of desire, which, in turn, triggers his, and which leads to the complications in the following acts.

Another example of the potentially scandalous nature of Nina's character and activities is defined by the revelation of her abortion. At the time the play was written, abortion was illegal, performed in secret by poorly trained abortionists in unsanitary conditions, with the result that many women lost their lives. A woman who survived was often left sterile, and if her abortion ever came to light, she became socially sterile as well, rejected by society. Marsden's disgust is a typical reaction of people of the period, but the point to note here is that neither he nor Darrell completely abandons his feelings for Nina. In other words, love, desire and obsession prove stronger than personal and societal distaste, an aspect of their relationships that today might be seen as admirable, but at the time in which the play was produced might have been a way in which the interlude documented by the play could be defined as "strange."



Part 1, Act 5

Part 1, Act 5 Summary

This act takes place in a small house on the east coast a few months later. Nina, visibly pregnant, sits alone. Her thoughts reveal that she's just felt her baby move, that Darrell's its father, that she believes the baby is truly a love child because she loves Darrell so much, and that he's resisted loving her but she's manipulated him until she's sure he does. Her thoughts become poetic as she describes herself as "living a dream within the great dream of the tide" and imagines God as a mother. She closes her eyes and rests.

Evans enters, and as he looks at her, his thoughts reveal how he believes that she'd have been happier if she had married Gordon and how he's contemplating either suicide or divorce. He decides to tell her what he's feeling, but when Nina looks at him, he says instead that it's almost time for Darrell to arrive. Nina's thoughts reveal that she resents the idea of people thinking of Darrell's child as Evans' and that she's also considering divorce. She and Evans talk about how Darrell is bringing a letter of reference for Evans to get a new job, about Evans' guilt at not being a better provider, and how he thinks Nina's looking both happier and fatter, leading us to understand that he doesn't know she's pregnant. They talk briefly about Marsden, wondering whether he's going to visit and referring to the recent death of his mother.

Darrell enters, and he and Nina are about to greet each other lovingly when they realize that Evans is still in the room. Darrell gives Evans the reference letter, Evans thanks him, and Nina reminds him to shave before he goes into town. After he exits, Darrell's thoughts reveal the conflict he feels between guilt over what he's done and belief that things will turn out well. He and Nina apologize to each other, with Darrell saying he won't visit again. As Nina protests, Darrell's thoughts reveal his joy over her love for him, which he takes as evidence that she's finally forgotten Gordon. They also reveal his struggle to remain objective and view the situation as an experiment. Nina sees what's happening in him, her thoughts revealing how much she longs for him. His thoughts reveal he has similar longings, both of them finally verbalize those thoughts, and then the doorbell rings. Darrell immediately regrets his words, but Nina forcefully reminds him of their passion just as Marsden enters, obviously still upset over the death of his mother.

As Marsden enters, Nina's thoughts reveal her superstitious fear of having blackness and mourning in a place where there is so much happiness, but she tells herself to stop being silly. Marsden speaks about how terrible his grief is, but as Nina tries to comfort him, he gains control of himself and apologizes for making a scene. His thoughts reveal his awareness of something going on between Darrell and Nina, something he believes to be lust and describes as disgusting. He considers telling Evans, but he realizes that by doing so he'd be punishing Nina. His thoughts become incoherent, he tells himself to say something, and he says that in her last days, his mother asked for Nina and



wondered when she was going to marry Gordon. He reveals that Darrell was right--she did, in fact, have cancer, but none of the doctors he recommended could do anything about it. He accuses all doctors of being liars and hypocrites, but when Nina speaks angrily to him, he apologizes and says there's something about the room that makes him feel strange. Nina sends him out to see Evans, but as he exits, Marsden says he doubts that Evans would understand his situation, referring to how he never really got along with his mother.

As Nina's thoughts reveal her panic at being reminded of Evans' mother and the promise she made to make Evans happy, Darrell reminisces about the death of his own mother. Nina changes the subject, talking again about their love for each other, which Darrell again denies, saying she's letting her imagination get the better of her the same as she did for Gordon. He calls romanticism a kind of insanity and tells her she's acting foolishly, but then he admits it's partly his fault for indulging his desire for her. When she tells him her baby wants its father, Darrell reminds her they did what they did to help Evans. When Nina says she wants a divorce so she and Darrell can marry, he tells her it's out of the question, that they don't suit each other, and that he knows too much about her past. Nina talks about how she's lost all the important things in her life because she didn't have the courage to accept the happiness they offered, but that this time she's going to accept the happiness that both the child and Darrell's love offers. She turns his face to hers, his thoughts reveal how happy he is with her, they join hands, and he admits he loves her.

Evans enters, assuming Darrell is touching Nina in a professional way. Darrell plays along, saying Nina's doing much better. Nina exits to see to lunch, telling Evans she and Darrell want to talk with him later. Evans says he made Marsden rest, and asks Darrell what he and Nina want to talk about. Darrell's thoughts reveal his guilt over the potential destruction of Evans' life, his belief Nina is trapping him, and his sudden decision to sail to Europe, leaving Evans and Nina to find their own happiness. He tells Evans that he can't stay for lunch because he's got to get ready for his trip, explaining he's going to Europe to study for a year or two and that he only came out to say goodbye. He then tells Evans that Nina is expecting a baby, congratulates him, says he's already said goodbye to Nina, and tells him that when he comes back, he expects to hear that Evans is successful both as a father and in business. He tells Evans to tell Nina he said to be happy in their child, and exits. Nina enters, and Evans excitedly tells her how much he loves her and how glad he is that she loves him, confessing that Darrell told him about the baby. Nina asks where Darrell went, and when Nina seems confused, he reminds her that Darrell is sailing to Europe. Nina starts to go after him, but Evans tells her he's staying with friends until he goes and didn't leave any address. Nina appears to feel faint, Darrell leads her to a chair, and Nina's thoughts reveal her anguish at Darrell's leaving as she compares his departure to Gordon's. She tells Evans Darrell was lying and almost tells him Darrell is the baby's father, but when she sees his anguish and confusion, she realizes that she can't hurt him and tells him instead she's upset because Darrell spoiled her surprise. She confirms she's pregnant, referring to him by the same childhood name as his mother did, and Evans promises to make her happy. Nina's thoughts return to how she feels her child move, to her feeling of moving with the



tide, to the idea of God as a mother, and then, suddenly, to anguished recollections of her afternoons of happiness with Darrell.

Part 1, Act 5 Analysis

The play's central thematic statement, that an individual life is a brief interlude in the existence of the universe, is expressed in more poetic form in Nina's opening thoughts about dreams within dreams and tides within tides. The image is reinforced further in two subtle ways, both of which have to do with the relationships between mothers and children. The first is Nina's pregnancy, which in terms of the tide imagery means that within the tides of her life there is a new life developing its own tides. On the opposite end of the scale is Marsden, whose life had, up to now, been focused on the tides of his mother's life, which have now ebbed away completely, leaving him alone with his own tides for the first time. In other words, the interlude in his life of his mother's domination is over. All in all, this layering of imagery adds dimension to the play's theme, suggesting how it plays out on several levels in each life.

Another layering of imagery occurs in the repeated references to mothers and children--Nina and her baby, Evans and his mother, Darrell and his, Marsden and his. It's interesting to note that all three of the men have and/or had difficult relationships with their mothers. This provides both a contrast to Nina's determination to have a loving relationship with her own son, but it also foreshadows the unhappiness that develops between them in the second half of the play. At the same time, Nina's reference to Evans by the same name as his mother referred to him suggests that Nina's relationship with both her son and her husband is going to be as unhappy as Mrs. Evans' was with her son and her husband. It's no coincidence that this act contains the first point at which Nina refers to the idea of God as a mother, suggesting that on some level she's beginning a search for the more feminine, maternal, nurturing side of herself. She eventually discovers what she's looking for, but because she's an obsessive person by nature (and because one of the play's key themes relates to obsession) her focus on motherhood in general and on her son in particular takes on an intensity comparable to that with which she adores Gordon. Again, it's no coincidence that her son's name is also Gordon. This idea is developed further in the play's following acts, which dramatize her twin obsessions and their effects on the men in her life.

Dramatically, the central tensions among Nina and her three lovers redefine themselves yet again. The key element here is the contrast between the way the male characters attempt to hold their feelings in check and the way Nina repeatedly gives hers free rein. Darrell's struggle for control over his passions is particularly intense, with the technical device of moving back and forth between thoughts and dialogue effectively employed to dramatize and externalize something that otherwise would have remained internal and hidden. His struggle is paralleled in Marsden, whose being torn between his intense grief, disgust and love for Nina is just as vividly portrayed but developed with less depth. Evans' swings of emotion are the least dramatic of the three, mostly because he's a less complex character and again, his love is simpler. Like Darrell and Marsden, he resists his true feelings, but unlike those two characters, his resistance is not related to his own



sense of identity. Darrell has defined himself as objective and dispassionate, with his sense of self-worth being completely tied up with that self-image. Anything that challenges that self-image, such as his very non-objective passion for Nina, is seen as potentially destructive and, therefore, must be denied. By the same token, Marsden has defined himself through his mother, particularly her sense of propriety. Anything that seems improper, indecorous, or indiscreet--that is to say, anything like the passion and desire he feels for Nina--is, in his words, disgusting and therefore must be denied. Evans, on the other hand, resists his feelings only because he feels he's unworthy of Nina's love. The key point here is that he's defined not by a negative, as the other two men are, but by a positive--his love and devotion to his wife and, at the end of the scene, to his child. Of all the characters, he is the one most at peace with himself, the only one whose interludes of passionate feeling are not regarded as being unhealthy either by himself or by others.



Part 2, Act 6

Part 2, Act 6 Summary

This scene takes place in the same room, now warmly redecorated, a little over a year later. Nina sits knitting as Marsden, visibly aged and worn down by grief, looks through a book and glances at both her and Evans, who now seems happier and physically more solid than he was previously. Nina's thoughts reveal that her baby's been born, that she's named him Gordon, and that he reminds her of the other Gordon even though everybody says he reminds them of Evans, whom she refers to as a wonderful father. Her thoughts also reveal that she hasn't heard from Darrell but forgives him, that she's written to Evans' mother telling her how happy they are, and that she feels good about her life. Marsden's thoughts refer to his curiosity about why Darrell left, to how they ran into each other in Germany, and to how he hasn't been able to forget his mother. He hasn't written anything since she died, but he has had an idea and is hopeful he'll be able to get to work soon.

As Evans talks about how good and busy life is going to be in the next year, Nina's thoughts turn to how surprised, grateful, and proud she is. In his thoughts, Evans considers the amount of money Marsden's mother left him and wonders whether he'd be interested in investing in business. At the same time, Marsden comments on his distaste for Evans' kind of brash happiness and on his own intense loneliness. He then speaks aloud, telling Nina he's planning to ask his sister to come live with him. Nina teases him about how he's not married, Marsden makes a joke about how Nina is his one true love, and Nina teases him about finding a wife for him and lists her potential qualities. Marsden mentions that he couldn't marry anyone who had been promiscuous, and in Nina's thoughts she realizes that he's referring to her past in the hospital. As she responds angrily to him, he changes the subject and tells her he saw Darrell in Germany. Nina becomes flustered, and Marsden's thoughts reveal that he believes he was right to think she and Darrell were having an affair. Nina's thoughts reveal her jealousy, but aloud she jokes about how Darrell always seemed too serious to ever be involved with a woman.

Nina, Evans, and Marsden make light-hearted comments about the promiscuity of men in general and of Marsden in particular, but Marsden's thoughts reveal that for him, sex without love is impossible. Nina's thoughts reveal her suspicion that Marsden hasn't been promiscuous at all. Aloud, she makes jokes about the number of women he's had and the number of children he's fathered, which leads Marsden to comment that "it's a wise father who knows his own child." Nina, in her thoughts, takes this as a hint that Marsden knows the truth about her baby and becomes nervous. Marsden says Darrell told him he was planning to stay in Europe indefinitely and that he asked about the baby. In her thoughts, Nina reacts joyfully but conceals her feelings, realizing she has to get Marsden back under her control. She speaks intimately and fondly with him, refers to him in her thoughts as her most dependable friend, thinks again that she can never let him know the truth about the baby, and then exits with Evans to see the baby.



Left alone, Marsden's thoughts veer back and forth between excitement at being close to Nina, disgust with his body and with his work, resentment that she loves him only as a friend, and determination that she can't dismiss him that easily. Evans enters, talking happily about his son and saying he's going to be a better athlete than the original Gordon. He also talks about how happy and content he is with his work and with his family, and about how he sees a chance to make some real money, but he needs a \$100,000 to get started. Marsden realizes Evans wants the money from him, and he immediately says he can't think of anyone with that kind of money. In his thoughts, Evans resolves to keep trying, and then aloud, offers Marsden a partnership, suggesting they go for a walk to talk about it. Marsden refuses to go, saying he wants to think about his new book. Evans exits without him. In his thoughts Marsden comments on how Evans always seems so futilely busy, on how he's not doing much better himself, and on how silly the idea of a partnership is. The doorbell rings, and Nina calls to Marsden from offstage, asking him to see who it is. Marsden opens the door and admits Darrell, who calls to Nina. Nina, barely restraining her joy, calls that she'll be there in a minute.

Marsden and Darrell enter, with Darrell's thoughts revealing that he's finally giving in to his passion for Nina while Marsden's thoughts reveal that he's aware of Darrell's feelings. Aloud, Darrell says he came back because his father died, and he has to settle the estate, leading Marsden to think about how this will make Evans want to get money from him and how he has to be the one to protect both Evans and Nina from Darrell. Nina comes downstairs, having tidied herself up. As Darrell jumps up to meet her, in her thoughts Nina realizes he still has a passion for her, but she speaks coolly, and Darrell realizes she's playing a role to fool Marsden. He and Nina talk about how they've missed each other, and Marsden refers to the woman he saw Darrell with in Germany. Darrell admits that she was his mistress, Nina says she's not surprised he had one, and Marsden talks about how well Evans is doing in business and what a good father he is. All the while, the thoughts of all three reveal the games they're playing--Marsden to destroy Nina's love for Darrell, Darrell to make Nina jealous, and Nina to get Darrell to admit his feelings.

At one point Nina refers to her son by his name, Gordon. Darrell's thoughts reveal first his anger about how she's still so devoted to him and then his determination to win her. Meanwhile, Nina's thoughts reveal her determination to continue her relationships with both Evans and Darrell. Marsden's thoughts reveal his sudden suspicion that Darrell is the baby's father, his determination to fight on the baby's behalf, and his disgust with both Darrell and Nina. He exits to find Evans, suggesting that Nina and Darrell have a lot to talk about. After he's gone, they confess that they love each other, that they missed each other desperately, and that Darrell is eager for her to run away with him, saying that Evans has to give them a divorce. Nina tells him Evans has devoted his life to her and that a divorce will kill him. She talks about her pride in having made him happy, and that together they've made Darrell's son his (Evans') son. Darrell threatens to go away again, but Nina begs him to stay, saying he can once again be her lover, that Evans will never know, and they can all have what they want. Darrell accuses her of being calculating, and Nina accuses him of teaching her how. Darrell says he will never stay and watch Nina build a life with Evans, saying that he'll tell Evans everything.



Evans enters and greets Darrell happily. Nina says Darrell has something to tell him, but Darrell's thoughts reveal he can't follow through on his threat, and aloud, he just says he's glad to be there. Marsden enters, which leads Nina to refer to them as "[her] three men" and to command them to be quiet, saying they can't wake the baby. We then hear the thoughts of all four, with Darrell's referring to his reluctance to destroy Evans' happiness, his view that his "experiment" has been a success, his reluctant acceptance of Nina's terms, and his jealousy of Evans' happiness. Evans' thoughts refer to the changes he's undergone since the birth of his son, his eagerness to talk to Darrell about money, his pride in Nina, and his curiosity about her state of high excitement. Marsden's thoughts reveal his acceptance of his position in Nina's life, his desire to forgive her past, and his compassion for Darrell. In her thoughts, Nina exults in the power she has over the men, how she feels their desires converging in her, and her superstitious fear that "God the Father" will hear and destroy her happiness. Evans sees her excitement and urges her to rest. She kisses each of the men in turn, Evans and Marsden with simple affection but Darrell with hints of passion. As she exits, the three men all watch her.

Part 2, Act 6 Analysis

This action contains what might be described as a mini-climax, a point at which several thematic and dramatic elements come together to make a central statement. That point is the moment at which Nina looks at the three men who love her, realizes the control she has over each of them, and refers to them as "her men." This moment dramatizes the central issue that, to this point, has mostly been just hinted at--the lives and perspectives of these men all revolve around Nina. What heightens the impact of this moment is not so much Nina's exultation as it is the fact that the men have acknowledged their position, resigned themselves to their obsessions, and realized that for better or for worse, their happiness depends on her. Legally, she is married only to Evans, but emotionally, the other men feel married to her as well, with each accepting the presence of the others. Admittedly, there are resentments--Evans alone seems perfectly content, partly because he has no idea of what's going on between Nina and the other two, partly because he is genuinely grateful for their friendship, and partly because his love has, from the beginning, been significantly less tortured. Marsden, on the other hand, is deeply resentful, mostly as a result of his judgmental and conservative nature. He says he's willing to accept the situation, but his overall character and his actions so far give the impression that this isn't necessarily true. Interestingly, despite being the man most passionately involved in this situation, Darrell seems to hold the least resentment, accepting the situation for what it is and appearing to be determined to be grateful for what he gets.

From Nina's perspective, this moment is the culmination of everything she's striven to achieve since the beginning of the play. Several times she's referred to her desire for control and for accepting the happiness she denied herself by rejecting Gordon. By placing herself and her men in this situation, she's accomplishing both these goals, but most important, she's acknowledging herself as a sexually free and even powerful being. In Part 1, Act 1, it seemed clear that the end of her relationship with Gordon was



at least partially the result of her discomfort with her sexuality, an aspect of her personality that was also indicated by her promiscuity, given that frequent sexual activity with a number of partners is generally a sign of sexual unease. Now, however, we see clearly that not only is she accepting herself as a sexual being, she's rejoicing in that part of herself, a result she probably never anticipated. This is another way that her personal "interlude" could be defined as "strange"--she knew she wanted control over her men, but never in her thoughts or her dialogue articulated why. In the action of this moment, however, she finally does.

All three of the play's core elements have built to this point --the drama of the evolving, shifting relationships, the thematic ideas of obsession and interlude, and the technical device of thoughts being spoken aloud. There is the possibility that we could and would understand what's happening to each of the characters without the use of this device, which as previously mentioned is essentially the unveiling of subtext. If it hadn't been used, the true depths of the characters' passions, desperation, and determination might not have been as effective, apparent, or engaging.

Aside from the obvious way the situation itself foreshadows future conflict, other foreshadowing includes the references to Evans' business deal, Marsden's new book, Marsden's sister, and the second Gordon's potential for athleticism, all of which play key roles in the remaining action of the play. A final piece of foreshadowing, albeit a subtler one, occurs in Nina's mention of God the Father, evoking the fear His presence evokes rather than the sense of peace evoked by the "God as Mother," for whom she's previously indicated a preference. This suggests that on some level, she understands that the situation has the potential to become destructive rather than nurturing, an instinct that proves to be accurate as the action of the play's final three acts confirms.



Part 2, Act 7

Part 2, Act 7 Summary

This act is set in an elegant New York City apartment 11 years later. Darrell watches Nina as she watches their 11-year-old son, Gordon. Gordon's thoughts reveal how much he dislikes Darrell, and that Darrell has just returned after having been gone for more than a year. Nina's thoughts reveal how much she loves her son, how much she hates growing older, how tired she is of fighting for happiness, and how rare her "interludes" of passion with Darrell have become. They also refer to how bitter he seems, how he's given up his career in America because she convinced him to move to the West Indies and do research there, and how angry she is that he stays away for so long so often. Darrell's thoughts reveal his uncertainty over whether his "experiment" proved anything and his belief that Evans is the only sane person in the family circle. He hates Gordon's name because of its associations with the first Gordon, and he also believes that he's ruined his life.

Nina asks Darrell when he plans to return to the West Indies, and Gordon's thoughts reveal how happy he is that Darrell's leaving. Nina wonders aloud how it's possible for Darrell to leave his work, but Darrell says his work ended 12 years ago with an experiment in trying to affect human lives, which the audience understands is a reference to his experiment with Evans and Nina. He goes on to explain that he and Marsden have become wealthy after investing in Evans' business. His thoughts reveal his anger at Nina's expectation that he love Gordon and his resentment that she gave him to another man. He and Nina talk about whom Gordon resembles, Nina insists he resembles his namesake, and Darrell says that a bearing resemblance to the first Gordon is the last thing he'd want for a boy. He adds that he'd rather Gordon resembled Evans and he makes pointed, sarcastic comments about how successful he's become. Young Gordon's thoughts reveal how angry he's becoming at Darrell's attitude toward his father, and he finally shouts at him to stop, saying he hates him. Nina warns him to behave himself, or he'll be punished, even if it is his birthday. Gordon threatens to tell Evans what Darrell said, and Nina tells him to leave the room.

After he exits, Darrell talks about how Gordon has a perfect right to hate him, and his belief that it's possible Gordon somehow understands what's going on between Nina and him. He also talks about how Gordon has destroyed every birthday present Darrell has ever brought him, and that this year Darrell brought a beautiful and expensive boat, but he had planned to have it presented to him after he left because he couldn't bear to see it smashed. Nina asks for his forgiveness for hurting him, but he says she's given him the only happiness he's ever known. Nina speaks lovingly to him, they agree that they should part at this moment when they're happy, and they kiss. Gordon sees them, his thoughts revealing his decision to pretend he hasn't. He exits, and as Nina says she had a strange feeling of being watched, Gordon shouts that Marsden has arrived. Nina tells him to send him up, leading Darrell to comment on how much he dislikes Marsden,



mostly because he insisted on being involved with Evans' business when Darrell wanted to be the only investor as part of his responsibility to his son.

Gordon and Marsden are heard laughing and talking together, and Marsden enters. He greets Nina happily and Darrell coldly. Nina's thoughts indicate her intention to defend Marsden as, aloud, she says Darrell is leaving soon. Darrell and Marsden's thoughts reveal their intense rivalry at the same time as they speak politely, but pointedly, about each other's work. Marsden becomes uncomfortable, his thoughts revealing how much he cares for Nina, how close they've become since Darrell's been gone, and how disgusted with himself he is for not proclaiming the true depths of his passion. Nina's thoughts reveal that she senses Marsden's pain, that she blames herself, that she suddenly feels distaste for all three of the men in her life, and that she believes the most important thing in her life is Gordon. Aloud, she asks Marsden to go to the kitchen and help her make her favorite salad dressing for lunch, and they exit together.

Left alone, Darrell resolves to leave, his thoughts revealing that he investigated Nina's story about insanity in Evans' family and discovered that it was all true, and also that he's resolved to leave and never come back. Gordon appears in the door, carrying the model ship given to him by Darrell. His thoughts reveal that he thinks the gift is beautiful, but that he feels he has to destroy it just because of who it came from. He starts to cry and smashes the boat, saying to Darrell that's what he thinks of him. Darrell begins to lose his temper but quickly gets himself under control, saying Gordon should have thought instead about how beautiful the boat was. Gordon admits he loved the boat, but adds that he hates Darrell more than ever after seeing him kiss Nina. Darrell tries to convince him that he and Nina were just saying goodbye, that he'd never hurt Evans, and that there are things that honorable men like Gordon and him keep secret. Gordon becomes confused, saying he's an honorable man, but that he doesn't want to be like Darrell.

Evans is heard entering through the front door. Darrell convinces Gordon to hide the boat so Evans won't ask questions, and Gordon does so just as Evans enters the room. He hugs Gordon and greets Darrell, whose thoughts reveal his anguish at seeing his son loved by another father. He announces his determination to leave and says goodbye to Gordon, who, for the first time in his life, calls him Uncle. As Darrell exits, Evans asks where Nina is, and Gordon says she and Marsden are in the kitchen, his thoughts revealing his hope that Darrell never comes back and his curiosity about why Darrell always says his name with such distaste. He asks Evans why he was named Gordon, confirming what Evans apparently told him when he was a boy about being named after an old boyfriend of Nina's. In his thoughts, Gordon realizes that's the reason Darrell hates him, and resolves to be an even better Gordon than the first one. Aloud, he asks Evans whether he's anything like the first Gordon, and Evans says he is, promising that if he does as well in school as the first Gordon did, he'll give him anything he wants.

Nina overhears as young Gordon recalls a story about the first Gordon's efforts on his college rowing team, in which he inspired his team to victory but fainted as soon as the race was won. Her thoughts reveal her concern that young Gordon is closer to Evans



than he is to her and her determination to win him back. She realizes Darrell is gone, and Gordon tells her he's never coming back. Nina then realizes he saw Darrell and her together, and she pretends to be glad he's gone. Evans accuses her of being hard on him, but Nina continues, saying he was being tiresome and that she kissed him to be rid of him. Gordon's thoughts reveal his relief, and he happily goes to her. Nina embraces him, but in her thoughts becomes remorseful about the way she's spoken about Darrell, recalls her love for him, and prays to "Mother God" that the truth about the identity of Gordon's father can someday be revealed. Gordon sees the look on her face as she thinks, realizes what she's thinking about, and runs from her, saying that he's going out to see whether lunch is ready. After he exits, Evans tells Nina that Gordon is too old to be babied, saying that's why Marsden is the kind of man he is--his mother never stopped babying him. In her thoughts, Nina again prays to Mother God that the truth can be revealed.

Part 2, Act 7 Analysis

The previously discussed idea relating to Nina's parallel obsessions with the two Gordons becomes more developed in this scene, as the audience clearly sees how she's projecting her love, need, and loneliness for the first onto the second. What's particularly interesting is how the action reveals that she's not the only one in this situation. Evans seems obsessed with turning Young Gordon into an athletically successful replica of the first one, while Darrell struggles with his natural inclination toward loving him in a determined effort to resent him as much as he resented the first one. Marsden's feelings about the two Gordons are less apparent, but they are developed in Acts 8 and 9, the circumstances of which bring the parallel obsessions in the lives of all the central characters into the forefront of the play's dramatic action and thematic development.

A related aspect to Nina's obsession is her increasingly obvious confusion between the past and present. In this scene it manifests mostly in her thoughts, because she doesn't seem to be fully aware of which Gordon she's loving at which moment. This aspect of her personality is developed further in the following two acts since she also begins to confuse Marsden with Leeds (her father). Meanwhile, the idea of interludes appears again in this scene, in Nina's reference to her interludes of passion with Darrell. Once again, the image is one of temporary change or transformation, fleeting experiences in the middle of a larger, less-exciting context.

In terms of the three men and their love for Nina, Marsden is still wallowing in his unrequited passion, Darrell is still torn between his passion and his desperation to be distant and scientific, and Evans is still simply devoted to her. All of them seem to be aware that Nina has less room in her life for them since she has given all her attention to Gordon. What is interesting is the way they react. Evans sees her feelings as only natural, and Marsden continues to remind himself to be patient because he believes that one day she'll love him in the way he's always wanted her to. Most important, Darrell struggles with jealousy in the same way he's always done, but this time his jealousy is complicated by the fact that Gordon is his son, whom he tries to love in the



same way as Nina does. This nearly obsessive intensity of feeling in him is noteworthy because of what we learn about him in the following two acts--how he transfers his focus from Nina and Gordon to a research assistant who becomes a surrogate son. In short, it's becoming clear that Darrell's journey is actually a parallel to Nina's, with both taking their obsessive feelings and shifting them to someone more willing to accept them. The parallels diverge later in the play when we discover that Darrell's new favorite accepts his attention while Nina's rejects hers. As a result, Darrell finds a kind of peace while Nina descends into a mental state that isn't necessarily madness, but it comes close. This dramatizes the play's warning about the dangers of obsessive love.

Several reminders about the characters' circumstances serve as foreshadowing. The first of these is the mention of Marsden's sister, reminding us of his living situation and foreshadowing his grief at her ultimate death. The second is Young Gordon's story of the first Gordon's success at rowing, which reminds us who and what the first Gordon was at the same time as it foreshadows the way Young Gordon repeats his experience in the following act. The third is the reference to Darrell's current career as a researcher, reminding us that he's abandoned his career as a physician and foreshadowing the increased importance of Darrell's assistant and protygy, Preston.



Part 2, Act 8

Part 2, Act 8 Summary

This act takes place several years later, and is set on the deck of Evans and Nina's yacht. Evans, Nina, Darrell, and Marsden, along with Gordon's girlfriend Madeline, have gathered to watch Gordon compete in an important rowing match. As Evans and Madeline talk excitedly about the weather, their binoculars, and whether they can hear the race on the radio, Nina's thoughts reveal her jealousy of Madeline, Madeline's thoughts reveal her awareness of that jealousy, and Evans' thoughts reveal his determination to see Gordon and Madeline married in spite of that jealousy. Darrell's thoughts also refer to Nina's jealousy, his recollection that Nina expressly wanted to see him, and his gratitude at having some emotional distance from her. Finally, Marsden's thoughts reveal that his sister is dead, and his deep state of grief.

Nina complains about how enthusiastically Evans is cheering, and he reminds her that she used to cheer just as loudly for the first Gordon, saying Young Gordon has become an even better athlete. Nina says aloud he's nothing like the first Gordon, adding that he's much more like Evans and reminding him to not get excited because of his high blood pressure. In her thoughts she wishes Evans would die, but then she corrects herself. In his thoughts, Darrell realizes what she's thinking and comments on how once, Evans' death would have meant he finally had a chance to love her freely. Aloud, he tells her Evans looks fine. Evans suggests that he, Madeline, Marsden, and Darrell go into the cabin for drinks, but Nina suggests that Darrell stay. Marsden's thoughts reveal his realization that she's still in love with Darrell, that he still has hope that one day she'll get over it and love him, that he's disgusted with himself for thinking of anyone but his dead sister, and that he's decided to get drunk. He, Evans, and Madeline exit into the cabin.

Left alone with Nina, Darrell's thoughts reveal his feeling that his past with Nina seems strange, distant, and unreal. Nina's thoughts reveal her belief that her "account with God the Father" is settled, that life exists only in the past and future, and that the present is only a "strange interlude." She compliments Darrell on how well he looks, and he tells her that his work as a research biologist is far more rewarding than his work as a doctor ever was. He talks with pleasure and pride about his assistant, Preston, calling him a fine boy. Nina's thoughts reveal her despair at realizing that Darrell has replaced his feelings for Gordon with fondness for Preston, and she resolves to make him remember that Gordon is his son so he'll help her break up his engagement to Madeline. Aloud, she comments that Darrell has found a son while she's losing hers, an idea that Darrell says never occurred to him but which, he says, makes sense. Nina talks about how Gordon has become more Evans' son than hers, saying it was Evans' dream that Young Gordon become like the first Gordon and adding that she hopes he finishes last in the race so he can again be hers.



Madeline enters excitedly, revealing that the race has started and that Gordon is in third place. After she exits, Nina talks about what a bad idea the engagement is. Darrell disagrees, but she reminds him that Gordon is his son and asks him to talk to him. As she touches him pleadingly, Darrell's thoughts reveal that he can still be aroused by her, and this reinforces his determination to not do anything about it. Aloud, he says he's never again going to interfere in the lives of other people. Nina hints that they still love each other, but Darrell repeats that he's not going to get involved. Nina's manner becomes a little strange, and she seems to lose track of the conversation, believing they were talking about Evans. Darrell says he looks fine, and says that his death is nothing to hope for. He then realizes he made a slip of the tongue by saying "hope." Nina says there's nothing wrong with thinking about it, but Darrell says life is more important than thinking. This leads Nina to refer to God the Mother and her determination not to lose Gordon.

Evans enters from the cabin, looking through his binoculars, straining to see the race, and commenting on how drunk Marsden is getting. Darrell takes the binoculars, and Evans exits back into the cabin as Nina, in her thoughts, plots to tell Evans the truth about who Gordon's father is, saying that that will make Evans want to help her break up the engagement. She resolves to get Darrell to help her, believing that she has to convince him that the story she told him about the insanity in Evans' family was a lie. Aloud, she says exactly that, but Darrell tells her he checked out her story and discovered it was all true, admitting that he had hoped at one point Evans would go insane so he could marry her. This leads Nina to say she still loves him, to insist it's time they claim Gordon for themselves, and to ask him to tell Evans he's Gordon's father. Darrell says once more that he's not going to meddle in the lives of others. Nina says they have to punish Evans for keeping them apart, saying Darrell was her one source of happiness. In his thoughts, Darrell recalls her love for the first Gordon, but Nina's reminders that they would have been happy if it hadn't been for Evans wear him down, and dazedly, he agrees to help her.

Madeline cheers for Gordon, and Marsden appears in the doorway to the cabin, drunk and also cheering. This shakes Darrell from his daze, and he tells Nina he will never help her, saying he was never more to her than a substitute for the first Gordon, whom he describes as Young Gordon's spiritual father. In his thoughts, he cheers for Young Gordon's opponents as Nina, in her thoughts, realizes he'll never tell Evans now. She prays to the first Gordon to help her win back his son.

Marsden talks drunkenly about how glad he is that Nina and Darrell no longer love each other, adding that he no longer wants Nina and that he hopes Gordon loses. Darrell looks through the binoculars, sees the rowers coming, and exits to tell Evans and Madeline. After he is gone Marsden talks about how it would do Gordon good to be defeated, how both Gordons should be defeated, and how it won't be long before he and Nina are married, saying he knows she's still married, but he can wait. Evans, Darrell, and Madeline enter, cheering as they see Gordon and the other rowers approach. As Nina's thoughts reveal her plan to tell Madeline about the insanity on Evans' side of the family in the hopes that it will turn her against Gordon, Marsden talks about the next book he's going to write, a story of truth based in what's happened to



Nina and all her men. He talks about how the last chapters of the book are being written at that moment, and he excuses himself to watch the race, saying it's his duty as a writer to know the ending.

As Evans complains about not being able to know what's going on in the race, either through the binoculars or over the radio, Nina insistently calls Madeline to her. In their thoughts, both Marsden and Darrell wonder what Nina's up to as she demands that Madeline promise not to tell Gordon what she's about to reveal. She insists that Madeline and Gordon cannot marry, but just as she's about to explain why, Darrell intervenes, saying Nina isn't well. Madeline accepts what he has to say and goes back to watching the race as Nina speaks angrily to Darrell, who tells her he had to intervene to ensure Gordon's happiness. He turns his attention back to the race, Madeline shouts out Gordon's name, and Nina echoes her faintly, giving the impression that she doesn't know which Gordon she's cheering for. Marsden goes to her and offers to help her. Nina explains everything to him, including Evans' family history of insanity and that Darrell is Gordon's real father. She also calls him "Father." Madeline, Evans, and Darrell all cheer as Marsden reacts to Nina with shock, speaking forgivingly to her when she says that only he, whom she refers to as her father, and Gordon are alive to her now--but to which Gordon she's referring isn't clear. She also says that she forgives him (her father), reminding him he must not ever meddle in human lives again. This is a reference to the way Leeds told the first Gordon he and Nina couldn't be married.

Darrell starts cheering for Gordon's opponents. Evans becomes angry as Darrell says "these Gordons" have got to be beaten, but as Evans confronts him, Darrell weakens, saying that Gordon is always meant to win. As the race draws to its conclusion, in her thoughts Nina hears Father God laughing, and then she prays to Mother God to bring Gordon back to her, saying Madeline's love and Father God's laughter will destroy him. Evans cheers hard for Gordon as Gordon wins. Madeline comments that Gordon has fainted as Evans embraces Nina, who hysterically shouts that Gordon is her and the first Gordon's son, not his. Evans calms her, saying that Young Gordon definitely has Gordon's spirit. Suddenly, he collapses. Nina rushes to his side. Darrell's thoughts reveal a moment of hope that Nina can be his at last, but then he pushes those thoughts aside, examines Evans, and announces he's had a major stroke. Nina wonders out loud whether her secret hopes caused it, but Darrell tells her not to be silly and superstitious, and he orders that Evans must have complete rest. Marsden thinks to himself that he won't have long to wait, but then aloud, he asserts his loyalty to Evans and to the family. Aloud, Nina recognizes that Evans did everything he could to make her happy, and that, in return, she's resolved to ensure that Gordon and Madeline marry. In her thoughts, Madeline refers lovingly to Gordon and how he'll soon be resting in her arms.

Part 2, Act 8 Analysis

One of the challenges in considering this play is its complexity--the characters' mixed motives, their intricately layered emotional states, the multiple meanings of many of its central images, and the sometimes contradictory thematic references. The technical



device of having the characters' thoughts spoken aloud simultaneously highlights and develops this complexity, which is more intricately woven in this scene than anywhere else in the play. At this point almost all the characters switch perspectives, intentions, and emotions more than once and often within a line or two, creating a wild sense of escalating desperation and tension paralleled by the narration of the race, which is, in fact, a metaphor for the action on the boat. In short, this act contains the climax of the play, for at the same time as Gordon is racing to define himself as a winner, Nina, Darrell and Marsden race to accomplish their goals and redefine their truths. They also want to be winners--Nina over Madeline, Darrell over Nina, and Marsden over Darrell.

By the end of Gordon's race, these other races have also drawn to a close. Nina loses, sending her over the edge and into a dissociation from reality in which she becomes increasingly unable to tell the difference either between the Gordons she's desperately trying to hold on to or between her father and Marsden, who represents the paternal wisdom, patience, and unconditional love she longed for from Leeds. On the other hand, Darrell has won through his determination to be objective and free himself from Nina's winning out over the occasional flashes of jealousy and longing that flare up in him. For his part, Marsden has lost, but he is clearly determined to "race" again, i.e., strive to win Nina's heart.

As for Gordon, his victory represents his own victory over Nina's jealous determination to keep him for herself and destroy his engagement with Madeline. The deliberate parallel between his race and the first Gordon's race, as described in Act 7, in which they both win and then faint, is therefore ironic, since the first Gordon's victory symbolized his victory over Nina's heart, and the second Gordon's victory symbolizes his losing it. At this point, an important thing to note is that the characters of Evans and Madeline serve mainly in this scene as contrast, their plainness of emotion and singleness of intent serving to illustrate and further define the extreme volatility of the emotions and intentions of Nina, Marsden, and Darrell.

A central thematic tension also plays out in this scene between Father God and Mother God, as defined by Nina. Granted, as a character she is clearly becoming even more disconnected from reality than she was in the play's earlier scenes, with the result that her thoughts betray more than a slight hint of madness. Nevertheless, her thoughts throughout the play about the two different aspects of God do define her character, her relationships, and her motivations. In this scene, it becomes clear that Father God represents romantic love and its dual capacities for passionate joy and destructive obsession. On these terms, Nina's love for Darrell and for Gordon, and theirs for her, becomes a negative. Her prayer at the climax of the race defines this further, suggesting that from her perspective, similar romantic love between Madeline and Gordon is, or will be, just as destructive.

It also becomes clear in this scene that Mother God's love, in spite of Nina's previous belief that it is nurturing and selfless, can be just as destructive. Nina's prayer for Mother God to bring Gordon back to her refers back to Mrs. Evans' obsessive love for her son and her determination that he be happy on her terms, not his. This idea is reinforced during the conversation between Nina and Mrs. Evans in Part 1, Act 3, in which they

both reject Father God and evoke the presence and love of Mother God. In this scene, Mrs. Evans, in spite of her good intentions, is clearly as obsessed, as determined, and as destructive as what Nina becomes. The thematic point here is that if love is allowed to be simply love, rather than evolving into obsession and a desire for control, life would be simpler. The defining example here is Evans, whose love for both Nina and Gordon has always been just that--love.



Part 2, Act 9

Part 2, Act 9 Summary

This final act takes place on the terrace of the Evans' expensive West Coast home. Gordon, now an athletic and handsome 19-year-old man, is consoled by Madeline after the death of his father. Their conversation reveals that Gordon is extremely resentful of Nina, who to him seemed indifferent and insensitive to both his father's illness and his death. Madeline tries to convince him Nina behaved lovingly, but Gordon reveals his belief that she never truly loved Evans, that she loved Darrell more, and that the two of them will soon be married. Madeline vows in her thoughts to always be faithful, but then she says aloud that no one can be blamed for loving.

Marsden enters without their noticing, comments in his thoughts on how disgusting he finds the physical comfort that Madeline is offering. He then berates himself for feeling this way, reminding himself that his life is calm, quiet, and beautiful with Nina now at its center. Aloud, he interrupts them by presenting Madeline with a freshly cut rose. As she considers what his gesture means, Gordon and Marsden discuss where Nina is, and Marsden exits into the house to fetch her. After he's gone, Gordon and Madeline discuss their plans for flying home. Their conversation indicates that Gordon plans to fly their plane himself and that he needs to get back to work because of his desire to fill his father's shoes at their company. After Madeline exits to get ready, in his thoughts Gordon berates himself for thinking happily about Madeline when he should be still grieving for his father. He again thinks badly of Nina and then, when he sees her enter from the house with Darrell, thinks about how angry seeing them together makes him.

In her thoughts, Nina realizes that Gordon is ready to say goodbye to her, and that he's become a stranger. At the same time, Darrell's thoughts refer to how glad he is the funeral is over, how eager he is to get back to work and to Preston, and how strange it seems to be looking at so much hatred in his flesh-and-blood son's eyes. After Gordon speaks dismissively about what he sees as Nina's apparent lack of grief, Nina's thoughts reveal that Evans died peacefully, and that she's grateful that all the complications his life brought into hers are over. She also thinks about her decision to return to her father's home and live there, where life was simple before the first Gordon came into her life and started the whole "tangled mess of love and hate and pain and birth." Darrell's thoughts reveal his increasing anger toward Gordon for speaking disrespectfully to Nina and his determination to speak the truth about who his father is, now that Evans is dead.

Gordon reveals that Evans left Darrell's research firm a significant legacy. Both Darrell and Gordon talk about how strange it is that Evans did such a thing, with Darrell's thoughts revealing his sudden belief that Evans has not only stolen the woman he loves and his son, but is also trying to steal his integrity. Nina reminds him that the bequest was made to support science. In his thoughts, Gordon angrily comments on how tenderly she speaks to Darrell, and then aloud, says sharply that Darrell had better



accept the money. Nina rebukes him for speaking that way. Gordon says he hasn't said all he has to say, and Darrell angrily tells him he'd better go ahead and say it all. Tempers flare between the two of them, and Gordon strikes Darrell. Nina is shocked into crying out that he's hitting his father, which an immediately contrite Gordon takes to mean that she says it's as though he's hitting his father, and apologizes. He tells them that all he was going to say was that he knows how Darrell and Nina feel, and have always felt, about each other, that he respects them for not acting on it, that he hopes they'll be married, and that they'll have the happiness they deserve. As he prepares to leave, Darrell tries to tell him the truth, but Nina forestalls him, asking Gordon whether he thinks she was ever unfaithful to Evans. Gordon protests that he would never think that. Nina asks Darrell whether there's anything he wants to say, Darrell says no, and Gordon exits. After he has gone, Darrell and Nina agree to not marry, saying their memories would torture them to death. They recall the happiness of their affair, and Darrell says he's going back to work, urging her to marry Marsden. Marsden hears the end of the conversation and interrupts, which leads Nina to think that all she desires now is the peace of life with him. She tells him that she's always loved his love for her and asks whether he'll let her live and die in peace. He says he's always wanted to bring her peace, and they agree to marry.

As Darrell prepares to leave, Nina asks whether they'll see each other again. They agree that it's best for them not to. Meanwhile, Marsden talks about his plans for his and Nina's wedding and for living in her father's house. The sound of an airplane is heard, and Nina, Darrell, and Marsden all watch as Gordon takes off, circles the house and waves. Darrell shouts out that he's Gordon's father and then realizes that Gordon can't hear him, referring to him as Gordon's son. Nina shouts that Gordon must fly to heaven and not crash to earth like the other Gordon. Darrell says goodbye, realizes she's paying no attention to him, and goes.

After watching Gordon's plane disappear, Nina seems to not know where she is. She refers to Marsden as "Father," talks about how Gordon is dead, and then realizes who she's talking to, referring to Marsden by his name and saying Gordon has just flown away. As Marsden puts his arm around her, Nina talks about how all sons become the Father, leaving their mothers behind. Marsden gently urges her to let go of her dreams for both Gordons, and to think of the past as an "interlude" of preparation for peace. Nina agrees with him, referring to her "strange interlude" and saying she feels like a girl again and that she's looking forward to going home to die in peace. He lowers her head to his shoulder and urges her to rest. As she falls asleep, she refers to him as both her father and himself. Lights fade to black as she falls asleep, and he watches her.

Part 2, Act 9 Analysis

Aside from Nina's apparent descent into a kind of gentle madness, the most important element of this scene is the way in which several different aspects of the idea of "Father" come together. There is the way that Evans' role as Gordon's father seems revered by almost everyone concerned, reinforcing the idea that his brand of simple, straightforward, unconditional love is an ideal. Then there is Darrell's desperation to be



recognized as Gordon's true father, a final flash of bitterness and jealousy that contrasts interestingly with his determination to be a good father to his surrogate son, Preston. There is the way that Marsden becomes a kind of father figure to Nina, loving her tenderly in the way it seems as though her flesh-and-blood father never did. Finally, there is the way all three of these intensely caring fathers contrast with what Nina said about God, the ultimate Father, as being indifferent, a contrast that suggests she's coming to realize that he is not as bad as she believed him to be, or, at least, that he's not as entirely bad.

It seems as though in this scene Nina is coming to believe that God the Father can be nurturing and capable of creating a place where she can be both peaceful and safe. This is indicated by her connecting with Marsden, who becomes a loving and gentle father figure and by her determination to return to her father's house, which is perhaps a reference to the Biblical idea that Heaven is God's house with many rooms. Her old anger toward Father God hasn't completely dissipated, however, a situation underscored by her comment about sons all turning into Fathers, which is a reference to how sons become as indifferent as she previously believed Father God to be. All this combines to suggest that she's not yet completely convinced that Father God can be loving, but that she is beginning to change her perspective.

The thematic idea of interludes also appears here with the phrase "strange interlude" actually being used for the first time. In this scene, particularly as a result of this reference, it becomes possible to see how the entire play is an extended metaphor for life itself, with Nina's acceptance of Marsden's embrace symbolizing the final embrace of God the Father at the moment of death. This idea is supported by Nina's repeated references to dying and to peace, and by the aforementioned parallels between Marsden and God, which could be expanded to include the reference to Marsden's patience, given that infinite patience is one of God's attributes.

There's an interesting parallel to note in Gordon's means of departure. In Part 1, Act 1, there's a passing reference to the death of the first Gordon in a plane crash. The fact that Young Gordon doesn't suffer the same fate functions primarily to separate him once and for all from the ghost of the first Gordon, serving instead as another means of severing him from Nina. On a secondary level, because the play in general, and this scene in particular, carries thematic references to God, Gordon's flight perhaps symbolizes the resurrection of Christ, God's son who accepted his heavenly nature after living what might be called a "strange interlude" of his own here on earth.



Characters

Madeline Arnold

Madeline Arnold is the nineteen-year-old fiancée of Gordon Evans. She is pretty, tall, and athletic, with a direct personality. She knows what she wants and is accustomed to getting it, although she is also a good loser. She is popular with both men and women. Madeline is exasperated by Nina's hostility towards her, but she later admires the older woman for the way she nursed her husband after his stroke.

Edmund Darrell

Edmund Darrell is Nina's lover and the father of her son, Gordon. A neurologist, Darrell first becomes acquainted with Nina at the hospital for World War I veterans where she works. He is shocked by her promiscuous behavior there, which he believes is due to a martyrdom complex that she has developed following the death of her fiancé, Gordon Shaw. Darrell suggests a marriage to Evans as a way of restoring Nina to a more healthy frame of mind.

Darrell has a scientific, objective mind, and analyzes life dispassionately. When Nina tells him that she wants him to father her child, but to raise it as Evans's, he agrees to the proposition because he believes it will be the best thing for Nina and Evans. He also considers it an interesting experiment. But he does not realize that in carrying out the plan he will fall in love with Nina. Their tempestuous affair goes on for years, and he is unable to end it, even though he wishes to. He loses interest in his career and eventually takes up biology as a hobby, setting up a research station in the West Indies. He resents the fact that Gordon Evans, his own son, is being raised by Sam Evans to resemble the dead Gordon Shaw. This leads him to dislike them both, secretly wishing for Sam's death, and for Gordon to lose the college race. After Sam Evans's death, Darrell realizes that he no longer cares for Nina, but he still asks her to marry him, because it is what Gordon, who has guessed that his mother and Darrell were in love, expects. Nina turns down the proposal, as Darrell had wanted her to. He then gives his blessing to the marriage of Nina to Marsden.

Mrs. Amos Evans

Mrs. Amos Evans is the mother of Sam Evans. She is a frail, tiny woman of about forty-five, but she looks at least sixty. When she learns that Nina is pregnant she urges her to have an abortion, explaining that there is a history of insanity in the family. She had married while ignorant of this history, and she and her husband had not planned to have any children. Sam's father eventually went insane, and Mrs. Evans believes the stress of having to raise Sam was the cause. She urges Nina to have a child by another man and raise it as if it were Sam's.



Gordon Evans

Gordon Evans is Nina's son. His biological father is Darrell, but he is raised as Sam Evans's son. He never discovers who his real father is, and he dislikes Darrell, whom he has to refer to as Uncle Ned. Gordon grows up to become a strong, athletic, capable young man who resembles Gordon Shaw, the young aviator killed in World War I. Engaged to the attractive Madeline Arnold, Gordon is bound for success in life.

Sam Evans

Sam Evans is Nina's husband. They first meet, through their mutual acquaintance Edmund Darrell, when Sam is twenty-five years old. He is amiable but not very mature or accomplished, and he still looks and dresses like a college student. Sam falls in love with Nina, who, following Darrell's advice, marries him, even though she does not love him. Sam goes into the advertising industry but does not do well, making little money and moving from job to job. He feels insecure and knows that his wife does not love him. But when Nina gives birth to Gordon, whom Sam thinks is his own son, his life changes. Sam becomes more content and confident, and he starts to be more successful in business. Eventually he makes a lot of money, and Marsden and Darrell become wealthy through investing in him. Sam raises his son to be like Gordon Shaw, his old friend from college, and is rewarded when Gordon lives up to his expectations. Sam suffers from high blood pressure and dies seven months after having a stroke, which was caused by overexcitement as he watched Gordon win a college rowing race.

Professor Henry Leeds

Professor Henry Leeds is Nina's widowed father. He is a timid, intellectual man, a professor of Classics who tends to live in the past because he cannot face the realities of the present. He persuaded Gordon Shaw not to marry Nina until after he came home from the war because he did not want to lose his daughter. He also thought that Gordon was not good enough for Nina because his family was not wealthy or distinguished. Leeds was secretly glad when Gordon was killed. Nina realizes the negative role her father played in her relationship with Gordon and turns against her father because of it.

Nina Leeds

Nina Leeds is Professor Leeds's daughter who marries Sam Evans. She is tall and athletic with straw-blond hair. As a young woman, she fell in love with Gordon Shaw, a college student and outstanding athlete. But her father persuaded Gordon to postpone their marriage until after the war. Because Gordon was killed in the war, their love was never consummated. Devastated by Gordon's death, and angry at their self-denial, for which she blames her father's interference, she has a mental breakdown. When she recovers, she feels it is her duty to become a nurse in a hospital for veterans. While she is there, she indulges in promiscuous behavior with the patients as a way of making up



for the self-denial that she and Gordon had imposed on themselves. When she returns home after her father's death, she agrees to Darrell's suggestion that she marry Sam Evans, even though she does not love him. She is still not free of the memory of Gordon.

Married and pregnant with Sam's child, she agrees to have an abortion after Sam's mother explains the history of hereditary insanity in the family. Nina then deliberately has a child by Darrell and raises it as if it were Sam's son. She does this to make Sam happy and keep him from the madness that afflicted his father. But Nina falls in love with Darrell, and they have an affair that continues for many years, although it brings them no happiness. At one point Nina wants to divorce Sam and marry Darrell, but Darrell will not agree. Later, the situation is reversed, with Darrell wanting her to run away with him, but he is unable to persuade her.

Nina finds some degree of happiness as she raises her child, Gordon. She is never completely content with any of her relationships with men, whether the man is father, husband, lover, or son. By the time Nina is forty-five, she is dispirited and exhausted. Not only has she lost her one true love, Gordon Shaw, but her son Gordon has now left her to marry Madeline. She turns to Marsden, whom she has known since she was a child and regards as a father figure, and agrees to marry him. All her passion for living gone, she expects only a quiet life for the rest of her days.

Charles Marsden

Charles Marsden is a tall, slender bachelor who is thirty-five years old when the play begins. Marsden has a quiet charm, is always ready to listen and be sympathetic, and wants to like people and be liked. He is a successful novelist who writes comedies of manners. Always immaculately dressed, Marsden has a certain feminine quality about him. He may be a latent homosexual or bisexual, but he has shied away from the physical aspects of love ever since an unfortunate encounter with a prostitute when he was sixteen. He is somewhat afraid of life and this renders him less effective than he might otherwise be. It also means that Darrell, Sam, and later Gordon Evans have little respect for him. Marsden lives with his mother, to whom he is extremely attached. He is devastated when his mother dies of cancer.

Marsden is a friend and former student of Professor Leeds, and he has known Nina since she was a child. He is in love with her, and she is fond of him, but only in the way she might love an uncle. Marsden is jealous of Darrell because he guesses that Nina loves him, but as the years go by he waits patiently for Nina, always ready to be a friend. Eventually, she turns to him for protective companionship, which is the only kind of relationship he is able to offer her, and they marry. Marsden decides that they will return to Nina's childhood home, where they will live out the rest of their lives quietly.



Themes

Happiness versus Morality

Nina is motivated by an all-consuming search for happiness, and she believes that conventional morality is an obstacle to the attainment of it. It was conventional morality, instilled in her by her upbringing, that made her hold back from having a sexual relationship with Gordon Shaw because they were not married. Nina therefore rebels against this restrictive morality by becoming sexually involved with the veterans at the military hospital where she works.

After marrying Evans, she meets Mrs. Amos, who gives her a different perspective than that supplied by her father. Mrs. Amos believes that the greatest duty is to be happy. "Being happy, that's the nearest we can ever come to knowing what's good!" Mrs. Amos counsels Nina to ignore accepted notions of morality and take a lover who will father her child. Mrs. Amos is convinced that this will enable her son Sam to avoid the insanity that runs in the family. Nina accepts the argument that it is her duty to be happy, but she has guilty feelings about the prospect of committing adultery. Darrell talks her into it, though, by supporting Mrs. Amos's position. He urges her to "throw overboard all such irrelevant moral ideas." He argues that guilt arises only if a wife neglects her duty to provide her husband with a healthy child.

Ironically, the only character who attains happiness through the adultery of Darrell and Nina is Sam Evans. Darrell finds that his arrangement with Nina is not as simple as he thought it would be. He believes at first that a scientific mind such as his should be able to stay aloof from any emotional involvement. The scientist should use his rational knowledge to manipulate people for the sake of their own happiness. But his strategy fails when he falls in love with Nina. Their affair produces guilt and distress for them both.

Indeed, only for a short period in her life does Nina attain the happiness she so passionately seeks. This comes at the end of act 6, shortly after the birth of her child, when her husband, her lover and her older admirer (Marsden) all desire her, and when she believes she is in complete control of the situation. But this does not last, and she never fully shakes herself free of the memory of Gordon Shaw and the life they might have had together. She names her son after Gordon, but the young Gordon is not able to bring her happiness either, since he must inevitably leave his mother for another woman. Finally, Nina gives up the quest for happiness and accepts a quiet, peaceful life with Marsden instead.

Purgatory

Marsden interprets the twenty-five years that followed Nina's first involvement with Gordon Shaw as a kind of purgatory. Although purgatory is a Christian theological term



that refers to a place where sins are expiated through suffering, the term can also refer to any place of temporary suffering. Marsden tells Nina to regard those twenty-five years "as an interlude, of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy." This is the "strange interlude" to which the title of the play refers, a time in which each character must go through a process of purification. Nina has to act out and exhaust all her passions and desires and break all her illusions about what life is or can be, before she can return to the peaceful, untroubled life that she knew as a child, thus putting an end to the "strange interlude."

The Two Aspects of God

At various points in the play Nina refers to the two aspects of God—God the Father and God the Mother. God the Father is stern, judgmental, and punishes sins. It is God the Father who instills guilt in people, and Nina blames Him for her marriage to Evans, which she entered into because she felt guilty and believed she needed to be punished. She sees this aspect of God as "a male whose chest thunders with egotism and is . . . thoroughly comfortless."

Against this, Nina sets her concept of God the Mother. She regrets that men created God in a male image, telling Marsden that

We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth.

God the Mother embodies love, the values of the heart not the intellect, and understands human suffering because she shares it. God the Father, on the other hand, is aloof and does not permit human happiness.

Style

The major dramatic devices employed in the play are the soliloquy and the aside. A soliloquy is when a character is alone on stage and speaks his or her thoughts aloud. A dramatist uses this device to give the audience direct information about a character's motivation or state of mind. The convention is that the character always speaks the truth as he or she understands it. Acts One and Two both begin with long soliloquies by Marsden; Acts One and Five with a soliloquy by Nina; and act 4 with a soliloquy by Evans.

A related device is the aside, a convention in which a character speaks his or her thoughts aloud but these thoughts are inaudible to the other characters on the stage.

Both the soliloquy and the aside were staples of Elizabethan drama but fell into disuse in the nineteenth century. When O'Neill revived them, he also expanded the possibilities of the aside. Traditionally, the aside was only a short speech, employed occasionally during a play. The asides in *Strange Interlude*, however, are not only much longer than their earlier models, they are also used much more frequently, so that they become a fundamental part of the structure of the drama.

O'Neill's use of this device enabled him to show not only the discrepancy between the inner thoughts of the characters and their outer words and actions, but also the contradictory nature of the thoughts themselves, according to which a character may think one thought followed by another that flatly contradicts it, followed by yet another thought in which the original idea reasserts itself. This technique has something in common with the stream of consciousness technique used in fiction (also sometimes referred to as interior monologue), which attempts to portray the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings within a character's mind. Those terms are better left to characterize fiction rather than drama, but O'Neill's development of the aside tends to give the play the flavor of a novel, especially when it is read rather than seen in performance.

When *Strange Interlude* was staged, while characters were speaking their asides, the other characters would freeze in place, thus making it clear to the audience that they could not hear the aside.



Historical Context

World War I

The United States entered World War I in April, 1917. Conscription was introduced, and the first U.S. troops arrived in Europe in June. By July, 1918, over one million American troops were in Europe. The war ended in November, 1918. The United States suffered a total of 320,710 casualties, including 116,708 dead. The fictional Gordon Shaw in *Strange Interlude* was based on the real-life soldier, Hobart Amory Hare Baker (1892—1918). Like Gordon, Baker was an outstanding college athlete, playing baseball, football and hockey at Princeton University. He enlisted in the army and departed for Europe in August 1917, and by April 1918 he was serving with the Lafayette Escadrille (103rd Aero Squadron). Just as in the play, in which Gordon Shaw is killed in an airplane accident, on December 21, 1918, Baker was killed when the plane he was flying crashed.

The Boom of the 1920s

Whereas Europe would take many years to recover from the four-year carnage of World War I, the impact of the war on America was less profound. There had been no fighting in the United States itself, American casualties were only a fraction of those suffered by the other belligerents, and the U.S. economy remained strong.

The 1920s was therefore an optimistic era, and there was an economic boom (which is the background for Sam Evans's business success in *Strange Interlude*). Fortunes were made, ordinary people had money in their pockets to spend, and unemployment was low. Part of the boom was due to the growth in "assembly line mass production methods that created more consumer goods and made them available at lower prices. A Ford automobile cost \$290 (average earnings were \$1,236 per year).

Also, consumers were able to acquire more because of the introduction of credit plans, under which goods could be bought and then paid for over an extended period of time. The growth of mass advertising through radio, magazines, film and billboards also boosted consumerism (so it is not surprising that in the play, Sam Evans goes into advertising and makes a fortune from it).

Another reason for the boom of the 1920s was the introduction of high tariffs on the import of foreign goods. This system, which is known as protectionism, meant that American goods remained cheaper than those of their foreign competitors, thus ensuring that American industries continued to prosper.

The economic boom ended suddenly with the unexpected stock market crash of October 29, 1929, a day known as Black Thursday. From 1929 to 1931, stock losses were estimated at \$12 billion, and the worst depression in American history began. By 1932 there were twelve million unemployed. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt

created the New Deal, a series of economic and social measures designed to alleviate the effects of the depression.

Critical Overview

When first produced by the Theatre Guild at the John Golden Theatre in New York City in 1928, *Strange Interlude* was an unexpected success. The play lasted nearly five hours (not including the one-hour interval for dinner) and held the audience's attention throughout. It went on to become the most successful American play produced up to that time, with 426 Broadway performances in its first production. According to literary critic Travis Bogard, writing in *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, audiences at the time regarded it as a play "which dealt seriously with facets of human nature not yet fully explored" and which were just becoming more widely known in the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and James Joyce. However, not all reviewers shared the enthusiasm of the play-going public. Bogard points out that some regarded it as "naïve in its use of psychological theory, overly long and unclear in its theme." The play was also controversial and was banned in Boston because its content included topics such as abortion and adultery.

Strange Interlude was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1929, and when published, it became a national bestseller, the first time a play had attained this status. Over one hundred thousand copies were sold.

Largely because of its length, *Strange Interlude* was not performed frequently. But there was a production at the Hudson Theatre, New York City, in March 1963, which ran for 104 performances. Another revival on Broadway in 1985, starred Glenda Jackson as Nina.

In the early 2000s, *Strange Interlude* was generally regarded as the first play that revealed O'Neill's full power as a dramatist, although it was not considered the equal of his greatest plays, such as *The Iceman Cometh* and *A Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1



Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the influence of Eastern religious thought, as well as that of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, on O'Neill's play.

O'Neill believed that serious drama should probe the depths of existence and examine the role of human beings in the universe. It should reveal what the history and development of religion also revealed: the inner life of man. O'Neill's work is therefore informed by various philosophical and religious ideas that he gleaned from his wide reading. This is especially apparent in *Strange Interlude*, which reveals his interest in Eastern religious thought, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, and his interest in the nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whose work has much in common with Indian thought. O'Neill read Schopenhauer with enthusiasm when he was young and re-read him shortly before he wrote this play. What O'Neill absorbed from Schopenhauer was a pessimistic vision of human life, in which suffering, rooted in the endless striving of human will and desire, was inevitable. The only way to end suffering was to end desire.

The character in the play who most embodies desire is Nina Leeds. The play revolves around her relationships with the various men in her life: father, father figure (Marsden), romantic ideal (Gordon Shaw), husband, lover, and son. It is her need to fulfill every aspect of herself as a woman that drives the plot. The goad for this obsession on the part of Nina is her anger and guilt, which she feels because she allowed the moral taboo against pre-marital sex to thwart the flow of her desire for Gordon Shaw. With Gordon's death, her desire for a child by him can never be fulfilled. Her attempt to compensate for this loss is what drives her on throughout the long "strange interlude." All her men are a part of this passionate quest, which is at times touched with a kind of mysticism. Nina is searching for what, in popular parlance, might be called her "inner goddess." She wants to believe in a deity that is more in harmony with her being as a woman than the distant, punitive God the Father of Judeo-Christian tradition. For Nina, this female deity is associated with procreation, and with the great rhythms of the cosmos. One of Nina's happiest moments comes when she is pregnant with Darrell's child. In her soliloquy that begins act 5, she becomes a part of God the Mother in a vision of unity and peace:

my child moving in my life . . . my life moving in my child . . . the world is whole and perfect . . . all things are each other's . . . life is . . . and this is beyond reason . . . questions die in the silence of this peace . . . I am living a dream within the great dream of the tide . . . breathing in the tide I dream and breathe back my dream into the tide . . . suspended in the movement of the tide, I feel life move in me, suspended in me . . . no whys matter . . . there is no why . . . I am a mother . . . God is a Mother.

The imagery here suggests moon goddess, fertility goddess, and earth mother all rolled into one—all aspects of the cosmic feminine that historically have been excluded from orthodox Christian thought. In addition, nestling unobtrusively in Nina's meditation are



concepts that show O'Neill's interest in Eastern mysticism: the oneness of all things (as opposed to the separation between God and His creation in Western thought) and the ultimate reality of life that is unchanging and eternal, lying beyond the senses and beyond desire and thought. According to the *Upanishads*, which constitute some of the core texts of Hinduism, this state of pure, silent consciousness, known as Brahman, is also the essence of the individual self. To know Brahman is to know the eternal nature of the self. This is a state of knowingness, in which, as Nina intuits, questions die, because questions are only the products of the restless intellect and cannot be answered at the level at which they are asked. The answer to the question is to transcend the question altogether, exactly as Nina does in this brief moment of contemplation.

Unfortunately for Nina, she cannot maintain this state of being for more than a few moments. It dissolves as soon as her husband enters and she is brought back into the world of human interaction. Then the whole restless process, so well created by O'Neill in the characters' stream-of-consciousness asides, begins again as she thinks of her lover Darrell, wants a divorce from Sam, bemoans how she has sacrificed her life to him, and then immediately regrets all these thoughts as being unjust. This unremitting procession of unquiet thoughts is what Schopenhauer called the "endless stream of willing" to which all humans are subject and which ensures that no one ever knows contentment for more than a fleeting moment.

Schopenhauer saw the innermost nature of life as nothing more than the blind striving of an impersonal will-to-live, a "universal craving for life" which manifests most strongly in sexual desire, since this is how each species perpetuates its own existence. In *Strange Interlude*, Schopenhauer's notion lies behind the desire of Nina and Darrell to conceive a healthy child that will not be subject to hereditary insanity. As a man of intense passion who thinks he has made himself immune to love by cultivating the detached manner of the scientist, Darrell thinks that he can conceive the child as an experiment and not get drawn into an obsessive desire for Nina. He is, of course, quite wrong. Desire takes hold of him too, just as it has Nina, and buffets them both as it carries them along helplessly, like a boat swept downstream by a fast current.

All the characters, especially Nina and Darrell, but also Evans and Marsden, are helpless in this grip of desire. Their plight crystallizes in another of those fleeting cosmic moments when Nina seems to become larger than life and sees herself as an embodiment of the universal mother god who absorbs the many into the one. This moment comes at the end of act 6, when Darrell, Marsden, and Evans are all contemplating her with different degrees and kinds of desire. She is acutely aware of all their desires, and her desire dominates and absorbs theirs in a kind of maternal cosmic womb:

My three men! . . . I feel their desires converge in me! . . . to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb . . . and am whole . . . they dissolve in me, their life is my life . . . I am pregnant with the three! . . . husband! . . . lover! . . . father! . . . and the fourth man! . . . little man! . . . little Gordon! . . . he is mine too! . . . that makes it perfect!



But once again, it is perfect only for a moment. Salvation for Nina comes not in one of these inspired, mystical balancing acts, since life is continually in flux and cannot be frozen in one particular moment that happens to be pleasing to the desire-bound personality. Only when Nina lets go of the whole business of desire can she be free. But in her case this comes not through some deliberate act of detached contemplation—the Eastern ideal—but when desire simply exhausts itself, leaving behind it only a longing for rest and peace. And this is where Charlie Marsden becomes important.

Marsden is different from the other male characters, Darrell and Evans. Although he has an emotional attachment to Nina, it is not a sexual one. Sexually, he is undeveloped, and in that sense he is always beyond desire. The reasons for his sexual abstinence are a combination of latent homosexuality, an unfortunate encounter with a prostitute as a teenager, a naturally refined sensibility, and a neurotic attachment to his mother. He is also, as he admits to Nina, afraid of life, afraid of grappling with the really deep issues. When he is in Europe in the aftermath of World War I, he is unable to write because the issues are too large for him to deal with: "how answer the fierce question of all those dead and maimed? . . . too big a job for me!"

One of the key images of Marsden occurs in act 1. It is thought by Nina, who in this scene regards him with a kind of affectionate contempt:

What has Charlie done? . . . nothing . . . and never will . . . Charlie sits beside the fierce river, immaculately timid, cool and clothed, watching the burning, frozen naked swimmers drown at last.

These words are prophetic on Nina's part, since the fierce river is the river of desire that eventually will pull everyone under. In contrast, Marsden sits apart from the river, observing it. This remarkable image surely owes much to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs about the enlightened man, established in the eternal nature of the self, detached from the stream of desire which he observes without being affected by it. In this view, "being" is more important than "doing," and this is exactly the attitude that enables Nina and Marsden to find some peace and contentment at last. "God bless dear old Charlie . . ." Marsden says to himself, alluding to how Nina has always regarded him, "who, passed beyond desire, has all the luck at last!"

The Eastern metaphysical framework does not explain everything about *Strange Interlude*, which also draws on Freudian and perhaps Jungian thought, as well. But it does give insight into an aspect of O'Neill's thought, nourished by his wide reading in comparative religion and philosophy, that was an important part of his life and work in the 1920s.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Strange Interlude*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

Strange Interlude was filmed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1932. It was directed by Robert Z. Leonard and starred Norma Shearer as Nina and Clark Gable as Darrell.



Topics for Further Study

Are certain types of mental illness hereditary, as the play suggests, or was that an invention by O'Neill for dramatic purposes? Is heredity a factor in common mental illnesses such as depression? If heredity can contribute to mental illness, can this be predicted and prevented in individual cases?

Write a short scene in which two people meet, perhaps on a first date. Use the technique of the aside, as O'Neill does in the play, to show the discrepancy between what each person is saying, and what he or she is thinking.

Why is Sam Evans the character in the play who comes closest to attaining happiness? What is the cause of the anxiety, unhappiness, and neuroses suffered by Nina and Darrell? Is Nina right to blame conventional morality for her plight?

Investigate Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex, and show how the theory is relevant for the character of Marsden.



Compare and Contrast

1920s: The movie industry based in Hollywood develops rapidly, and cinema replaces the theater as a means of mass entertainment. This last decade of the silent movie nurtures stars such as Charlie Chaplin.

Today: Hollywood retains its preeminence as the movie capital of the western world. Going to the movies is the favorite cultural activity of millions of Americans.

1920s: The Volstead Act becomes effective in 1920 and bans the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor throughout the United States. Prohibition fails, however, because it is impossible to enforce. Alcohol is sold illegally in bars known as speakeasies. There are several thousand speakeasies in New York alone. Prohibition also produces an increase in organized crime, since large profits can be made from the sale of illegal alcohol.

Today: Alcohol abuse is a significant social problem. Alcohol is a contributing factor in thousands of traffic fatalities. In 2001, 17,400 people were killed in crashes involving alcohol, representing 41 percent of the 42,116 people killed in all traffic crashes. Alcohol abuse is also a factor in criminal behavior such as domestic abuse and other kinds of violence.

1920s: On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment becomes law, giving all women the right to vote. In the presidential election of 1920, women vote in patterns similar to men, dividing along party lines according to class, economic, regional, and other factors. In 1924, in Wyoming, Nellie Tayloe Ross is elected governor, the first female governor in the United States.

Today: In the presidential election of 2000, women make up 52 percent of all voters. Political analysts study the so-called gender gap, which reveals that women are more likely than men to vote for Democratic candidates. According to the Center for Policy Alternatives, a non-partisan policy center, if only women's votes were counted, Democratic candidate Al Gore would have won the popular and electoral vote in 32 states and tied in Colorado, giving him a landslide victory. In the elections of 2000, the number of female governors increases from three to five, the number of female senators from 9 to 13, and the number of female representatives from 56 to a record 59.

What Do I Read Next?

In the view of many, O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (first produced in 1956) is his greatest play. Based on the troubles of O'Neill's own family, the play follows the Tyrone family through one day in their tormented lives. Family background is revealed as they argue with each other, and in the end they retreat into the solace provided by alcohol and morphine.

Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy (2002), by Stephen A. Black, is a critical biography that examines O'Neill's life and work in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis. Black argues that O'Neill's plays came out of his attempts to understand his difficult relationships with his parents and his brother, all of whom died within a three-year period. According to Black, O'Neill mourned them for twenty years in his plays.

Louis Sheaffer's two-volume biography, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (1968) and *O'Neill: Son and Artist* (1973), remains the definitive biography of Eugene O'Neill. The second volume won the Pulitzer Prize for biography.

Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill (1988), edited by Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer, is a generous selection from over three thousand letters written by O'Neill. It forms a useful supplement to the biographies, revealing the many sides of O'Neill's personality, including lover, husband, parent, and friend.



Further Study

Alexander, Doris, *Eugene O'Neill's Creative Struggle: The Decisive Decade, 1924—1933*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, pp. 103—28.

Strange Interlude is one of nine plays analyzed in detail. Alexander shows how O'Neill resolved his personal struggles through his plays.

Floyd, Virginia, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment*, Ungar, 1987, pp. 334—52.

Floyd traces the growth of the play from O'Neill's early notes and scenarios, and analyzes it act by act. She argues that the plot is weak, and the strength of the play lies in the characterization.

Mannheim, Michael, *Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship*, Syracuse University Press, 1982, pp. 60—71.

Mannheim emphasizes the autobiographical elements in the play, which represent O'Neill's attempts to escape the pain associated with the deaths of many close to him, and his discovery of his mother's drug addiction.

Mannheim, Michael, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

This volume of essays contains studies of O'Neill's life, his intellectual and creative forebears, and his relation to the theatrical world of his creative period, 1916—1942. There is also a production history on stage and screen.



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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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